

10¢ PER COPY SATURDAY OCT. 4 BY THE YEAR \$4.00

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

*A Story
of "Queer
Street" and
the Price Men
Pay at Its End*

Where Dead Men Walk

by Henry
Leverage

*Author of
"Whispering Wires"
etc.*

MOESTEIN



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Chicago Engineering Works

DEPT. 430

441 Cass Street

CHICAGO, ILL.

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CII

NUMBER 2

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Inch**

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inch
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pliable,
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tan
leather.

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

*Classified Advertising Rates
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Classified Advertising Continued on Page 12.



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is W. L. Douglas
personal guarantee
that the shoes
are always worth
the price paid
for them

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W. L. Douglas

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Price 98c
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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Where Dead Men Walk

by Henry Leverage

Author of "Whispering Wires," "Micky McMasters," "The White Cipher," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"VILOS HOLBROOK."

"Did you ring, sir?"

Vilos Holbrook poised his cigarette and regarded its glowing tip reflectively.

"No, I did not ring," he said.

"Very well, sir."

"Gallagher!"

"Yes, sir."

"Wait!"

"Waiting, sir."

"Gallagher, how long have you been in my service?"

"Habout height months, sir, going on nine."

"And in that time you have asked me about a mythical bell at least one hundred times."

"Very sorry, sir. You see—"

"Gallagher!"

"Yes, sir."

"Call up the Primrose Club and ask the secretary if Major Garrick is in the card-room."

"Very well, sir."

Vilos leaned back from a library table and touched his shoulders against a wall. His head dropped into his hands after he had tossed his cigarette into a fireplace. He pressed his eyelids as he waited for the valet to return from the hall telephone.

He lifted his glance finally. His was a Norman face — as clean-cut as a cameo. The nostrils were slender. The nose was slightly arched without being in the least Semetic. He might have been a cardinal's secretary set down in a cloister but for the fixed strength of a doer and never a dreamer which showed in his chin and the straight lines of his mouth.

The valet returned and rustled the portières.

"The secretary says, sir, 'e's very sorry,' sir, 'but the major just stepped hout —hout hinto the night,' sir."

"He said that, eh? Well, that was just like the major."

"Yes, sir."

"Gallagher!"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you ever happen to run across the heart of this town during your festive in-

tervals—which are as frequent, I presume, as your purse allows? I believe they are that frequent."

"No, sir, I—"

"A place, Gallagher, where gentlemen go to look for their wayward sons and the sons go to search for erring fathers. A place to vivisect and analyze."

"Bless me, sir, hif I 'ave! As a gentleman's gentleman, hit would be no place for me!"

"Gallagher, I'm getting bored. I've an income, but it's small. I've this flat here, and it's too large. I want to discard electrical engineering and take up Balzac. I want to see life as it really is."

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but the very same thing 'appened to me Lud Stephney hin Hengland. 'E said 'e wanted to put new wine in an old bottle. 'E wasn't exactly tired of life, but 'e was a bit bored, y' know. 'E wasn't a young man like you, sir, even if your 'air is turnin' a bit gray. 'E an' me does the 'alls and Ratcliffe Road an' one or two places on the Surrey Side of the river. 'E was a Liberal, 'e was. No end of a swell, but a Liberal. An' now, sir, Lady Stephney is the same as whot was once Evie Shannon of the Alhambra—a very improper place, sir."

"The heart of London Town, then—"

"Hit ain't St. Paul's, sir. It's somewhere else. For me Lud Stephney, it was a music 'all."

"And the heart of this town?"

"On a night like this, sir, I would say the opera. The people over here, beggin' your pardon, sir, 'aven't the families back of them, sir, and one place his about like another, sir."

"Gallagher!"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is the true heart of *this* city—the place where people are natural? Where they live an breathe and drink and die in the good old way?"

"There's thieves' dens, sir, and there's 'orrible dives—just the same as Seven Dials and Whitechapel. Like as not there's plenty to see in those places, sir. Particularly hif you know the right door to knock upon. Hit's hall on knowin' the right door, sir."

"What I want, Gallagher, is a cross-road where the underworld meets the politicians, while the police watch on."

"I 'ave it, sir! The jail!"

Vilos showed an even row of well-shaped teeth without smiling. He stared at the valet with a quizzical frown. He brushed back his hair from his forehead and rose from the chair he had been sitting upon.

"Gallagher," he said, "as a servant you are passable. As a wit you are immense! The jail exactly fits my hypothetical question, but I do not want to go to the jail. I'll have to break a law to do that. The poor wretches in there are guilty of some crime."

"There's more outside lookin' hin than there's inside lookin' hout, sir. At least I've 'erd that, sir."

"Very true, but the ones outside haven't been caught. I want to meet them before they are caught. Can't you suggest a place of that kind?"

"A dance, sir."

"Do you know of one?"

"Hi do, and beggin' your pardon, sir, for not mentioning hit sooner. There's the Cooks' and 'Ousemaids' Union at the Anderson Music 'All. Hit's two bobs, with a lady, sir."

"Two bobs with a lady?"

"Two shillin', sir! Beggin' your pardon, sir."

"Gallagher, I can't very well go to that. You see I'm neither a cook nor a house-maid. Suppose you call up the secretary at the Primrose Club and ask him to tell you what is going on at the music halls or the West End. Tell him—"

"The West End, sir?"

"Yes, the West End!"

"Oh, sir, hif that is what you want, there's a Students' Ball there to-night! I put the card on your table in the smoking-room. Hit's hunder the paper-cutter. Hit's a card with a chorus lady kickin' an old cove's 'at hoff, sir. But you ain't going to that, sir? Hit isn't respectable."

"Sounds interesting," said Vilos. "I think I shall go. If Colonel Bishop calls, tell him that I am out for the evening. Make him comfortable. The port is in the decanter. There are some cigars in that

package I brought home this afternoon. Place the colonel entirely at ease, but under no circumstances tell him I went to the West End."

"Hi wouldn't tell hanybody you'd go to a place like that, sir."

"It's just what I want, Gallagher! Quick, lay out my clothes and call a taxi. You can wait till the colonel comes—then you can go to the Housemaids' and Cooks' Union at the Anderson, if you still feel inclined."

"That's why I asked did you ring, sir. Beggin' your pardon, sir."

CHAPTER II.

"GIPSY CRAGEN."

GIPSY CRAGEN was dancing at the Three Students' Ball. She held the eyes of a thousand votaries of Bacchus. The hour was late. The night, from art's view-point, was early.

Above the Gipsy, tier after tier of boxes lifted. They were filled with bediamonded women, champagne in silver buckets, and solemn-looking ravens whose youthful faces were said to be the oldest things in the city.

Fringing the gleaming, wax-polished arena of the hall, other ravens phalanxed to fan-fare or applaud the Gipsy who piroteted in their midst with light feet, dark-blue eyes, and parted hair.

As the toast of the evening she held aloft a brimming glass of champagne. Her round, brown arm, which might have been chiseled by Praxiteles, swung in a slow circle and reflected a myriad rays of light from the tinsel of her garish gown.

It was her night and her hour. Her olive-tinted face was lighted by a fire internal—an abandon and a blending of all the passions. She was *Salome* reincarnated to turn instead of take men's heads.

The witchery of wings was imparted to her slender figure and her tapping, high-heeled slippers. She glided, she poised, she lifted with the side sweep of the muse.

The ravens clapped their white-gloved hands as she passed in stately measyre. She tantalizingly held the glass from them.

She stood finally in the center of the hall and called in the clear voice of Pan:

"The grape is such a trouble, don't you know;

It's full of wit and bubbles, don't you know.

You sip it and you're dry,

You pour it and you sigh,

You drink it and you cry, don't you know.

"It makes you awfully bored, don't you know;

And you're glad when you are floored, don't you know."

For you only close one eye

When the others they will cry,

You're too full to drink, but you can buy,

Don't you know."

The Gipsy touched the rim of the glass with her lips. The band struck up a French march. The dancers linked and swirled over the floor in the intoxication of wine, music, and loud laughter.

Goose-girls with Lucifers; Gretchens with Alphonsons; airy Lillians and dark, Spanish grandees; old men and young women; roses that bloomed to bud again—all joined in the kaleidoscope of riot and boisterous color.

The occupants in the upper boxes leaned and hurled confetti and long ribbons of bright paper. They twined the feet of the dancers. The floor rocked with the maddening march of six hundred couples. The air was filled with perfume and scent from shaken laces. Old boys succeeded in looping light love's neck. Waiters hurried throughout the throng. Their shrill cries resembled reed-notes among Dervishes.

Standing within the press of anxious ravens, was Vilos Holbrook. He had heard the Gipsy's pagan toast. He had seen her touch her lips to the glass. He had caught her glance over a beaded rim.

He took a step forward at that moment. He thought better of this action. The girl vanished. The band struck up *Madelon*.

He turned away from the Saragossa of swirling forms and walked to a tinsel-wrapped post where he again sought for a second glimpse of the blue-eyed pagan who had toasted wine and bubbles.

His glance lifted to long rows of boxes. Each was crammed with women with red lips and men in dark garments. The tables

in these boxes were piled high with empty champagne bottles.

Dropping his glance he yawned and pressed his gloved right hand to his mouth. He decided to go down-stairs and look for the bar.

He descended a thronged staircase and glanced around. A bovine individual whose stout arms were laden with coats and cleaks ran into him.

It was Major Garrick of the Primrose Club.

"Holbrook! By corks, it's Vilos Holbrook!" said the major. "Pon my word, it is. Come, help me with these wraps. I'm up-stairs with Gipsy Cragan and her father. They're my guests. She dances—"

"Gipsy Cragan?" repeated Vilos. "Was she the one who gave the toast before they played *Madelon*?"

"Sure, she was! Know her?"

"No. I'd like to."

"How you down?"

"Taxi. I told the driver to wait."

"We can use it. Take some of these wraps and follow me. We're a popular bunch up-stairs. Join us in another bottle. It's here first and Elberta's afterwards. Know Elberta's?"

"Can't say that I do."

"It's a place down on Johnson Street. Come on and I'll show you some real life in the raw."

Vilos took a portion of the major's burden on his own arm. He followed the nodding, portly figure through the throng of students and waiters.

Airy, fairy forms in gossamer gowns tugged at the major's whiskers or struck him on the back. He chuckled in broad good-humor. He stopped once, shifted his burden and helped drink a *risque* toast.

Vilos was forced to admit that there was no better cicerone than the major. His good nature changed the entire evening. The women seemed lovely. The lights were brighter. The dancers on the rocking floor had all the graces of Terpsichore.

Mounting the broad staircase the two men stood before the curtains of a box. The major reached out and slyly parted these curtains. He glanced inside, then said:

"Ah, Gipsy! Gipsy, meet a frien' of mine—Mr. Holbrook. He came to the West End for a little fun. He saw you dancing. And—this is Mr. Cragan, Mr. Holbrook."

Vilos touched the Gipsy's fingers, bowed over the table, and offered to shake hands with a man who was crouched behind a rampart of bottles like a soldier in a trench.

Cragan clasped finally, after an awkward silence. He presented a grimy palm in the grip of which Vilos winced. He was a big man, in ill-fitting black clothes. A great, livid scar ran from the lobe of his right ear around and under a square-set chin.

Vilos sat down after the scrutiny. He leaned toward the Gipsy's bare right shoulder. He heard Cragan say to the major:

"Mike was here. He got fresh with the Gipsy. I don't like him a damn bit when he acts that way. He ain't got any business making eyes at my girl!"

"Easy," whispered the major. "Go easy. I'll see Mike Dugan. He hasn't anything on us."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"I am! Buck up! Get in the party and we'll wait till he comes."

Vilos noticed that the major had raised his voice. Part of the conversation might have been directed for the Gipsy's benefit. The two men started drinking.

Leaning further forward, and resting one hand on the rail of the box without being in the least familiar, Vilos studied the Gipsy's three-quarter profile.

No single regularity marred her features. Her mouth was full-formed, heavy, warm. Her teeth were small. There was the suggestion of a past sorrow in the tiny lines which spread from her lower lip.

He glanced at the dancers and then moved nearer her chair. She turned under his scrutiny. She flashed him a smile which rippled through the dark blue of her eyes like golden sunlight.

Vilos lowered his stare and studied her wrists and fingers. All were slender—elegant. Over-colored jewels crusted her bracelets and rings. They were not genuine. Their barbaric shapes reminded him

of a pagan goddess or an empress to Aleric at the sacking of Rome.

He made a mental note and drew a contrast. The Gipsy was far and above her worthy parent who had been so solicitous as to her welfare in the matter of one Dugan.

Turning, with his eyes still lowered, Vilos glanced at the bottles on the table and then up into the major's ruddy face. Garrick stopped whispering to Cragen and sprang to his feet. He dashed the curtain aside and succeeded in catching the eye of a passing waiter.

"Bring a magnum of *sec!*" he ordered. "Have it colder than that last bottle. Quick, now, my good fellow!"

Vilos twisted in his chair, leaned his elbows on the table and peered over the Gipsy's shoulder toward the rocking floor whereon were the swirling dancers.

"Do you want to go down?" he asked.

She turned and smiled. "No, Mr. Holbrook. I promised this dance to some one else. I didn't want to give it to him, so I'll have to stay here. You don't mind?"

"Not at all. I'd like to talk with you, some time."

"Some day you may come up to our flat. Father and I live alone. I keep house."

The Gipsy spread out her hands. She laid her fingers upon the table. The magnum arrived. The waiter drew the cork with a towel and arranged clean glasses.

Vilos lifted his glass and touched the brim.

"Some night!" bleated the major. "Everybody and their skeletons are out. This is what Mike Dugan would call a reunion and a renunciation."

"Who is Mike Dugan?" Vilos asked.

"Mike's the whole show. He's the power behind the throne. He's got all the political graft. He don't drink. He's said to own three saloons. He'll be over in a few minutes. He likes the Gipsy."

Vilos leaned back from the table. He stared at the girl's hair. Her head dropped slightly. She moved her chair to the edge of the box. She glanced down at the dancers. A step sounded near. The curtains were swept aside. A man strode in,

'Mike Dugan loomed crude and imposing with a triple-chin, a terrible jaw, and slate-gray eyes. He swept the box comprehensively. He moved a chair and sat between the Gipsy and Vilos.

"Hello, everybody!" he said. "Hello, Gipsy! What, not drinking?"

The major rose.

"This is Mr. Holbrook," he said. "Meet Mr. Holbrook, Mr. Dugan. He and I play bridge at the Primrose. He dropped in for a fling of night life."

Dugan turned and laid a hand on Vilos's knee.

"Glad to know you. Friend of the major's is a friend of mine."

Vilos moved his knee and twisted in the chair.

"Know any of these people?" asked the politician.

Vilos followed the hand which was lifted from his knee and thrust in the direction of the opposite boxes and the dancers.

"I can't say that I do."

"It's just as well you don't. Of course there's a few exceptions, but many of them are deep-sea men and con men and crooks. Few of them work."

"That's right!" exclaimed the major. They're a study. Half of our literature is woven around crime and the consequences of crime. I came very near being robbed in Chicago, once."

Vilos leaned behind Dugan and said to the Gipsy:

"They're starting another dance."

She glanced knowingly at Mike Dugan. The big boss shelved down his brows and coughed behind a hairy hand. He crossed his legs and uncrossed them. He reached out and wound his fingers around the stem of a champagne glass.

"Go on!" he said.

She rose and took Vilos's arm as he hastily got out of his chair. A minute later he caught the fragrance of a warm, close head on his shoulder. He felt a supple body sway and move with his own. They reached a position far from the box where Dugan leaned with pasty face showing white against the tinsel curtain.

"You must leave me," she said. "Get your coat and go home. Don't associate

with Major Garrick. Keep away from him!"

"Why, I've known him for years!"

"He lives two lives. You should not associate with him."

"But, I can see you? Let me have your address before I go."

She gripped his arm. Her hair brushed his ear.

"It's in the telephone book. Call me up some time. Take me back. Make your excuses. This is no place for you."

"But you?"

"I'm different! I was brought up this way. I've never known any other life."

Vilos was silent until he had seated the Gipsy in her old chair. He stepped from her and pulled out his watch. He stared at Major Garrick.

"I'm going," he said. "I had a corking time. Good-by, Mr. Dugan and Mr. Cragen. Good-by, Miss Cragen."

"Good-by," said the Gipsy without turning.

Vilos paused between the curtains. He glanced across the table. The gross, red hand of Mike Dugan was reaching the magnum toward the Gipsy. Sparkling liquid filled her glass to the brim. A smile passed between Major Garrick and the boss. The father frowned and made a protest. Mike Dugan finished pouring the wine in the other glasses. He set the magnum down and touched the Gipsy on her bare shoulder.

"Drink up!" exclaimed Garrick.

Vilos let the curtains swing. He went down-stairs, where he secured his hat and coat. After a wait he found his taxi.

The ride up-town to his apartment was not a long one. It occurred to him that he had been rude in the manner of getting away from the box-party. Vague statements concerning the genial major flooded over him. The man might be a rogue after all.

He dismissed the taxi and woke the elevator-boy. He was lifted to the eighth floor.

Entering his own private hallway he saw a light burning in the library. He opened his coat and stepped in through the portières.

An empty decanter and the butts of three cigars were upon a table near the fireplace.

The air of the close room reeked from port wine.

Vilos called for Gallagher. He received no response. He strode back through the curtains and softly opened the door of a spare room adjoining his own chamber.

A polished stick, a fur overcoat, and a badly soiled hat lay upon the dresser. Clothes were scattered about the room. The faint light from the air-shaft revealed a ruddy face and a long, red nose pressed within the cove of a white pillow.

"Hello, Uncle Bishop!" said Vilos.
"Hello! Hello!"

The old guardian did not move. He breathed with slow intakes. His face seemed strained and puffed. There were pouches under his eyes that Vilos had not seen there before.

Softly closing the door, Vilos went to the hall-tree and hung up his coat and hat. He glanced at his watch. He yawned and pressed his hand over his mouth.

It was time for all honest people to be in bed. He went the rounds of the apartment, opened the library window, and then undressed beside a narrow brass bedstead.

His drowsing thoughts were on the party and the Gipsy. She seemed to have the grace of a professional dancer. He wondered if the wine he had drunk had not warped his judgment. Perhaps, after all, she would not be so charming in the cold light of day.

He sank into sleep with his mind vainly trying to fathom the reason for Colonel Bishop's alcoholic condition. A cataclysm of some kind might have happened in the old man's affairs. He was the sole trustee of the Holbrook fortune. This fortune, although not large, was Vilos's sole dependence.

CHAPTER III.

"A VANISHED FORTUNE."

VILOS awoke with the dawn creeping down the air-shaft.

He yawned, then threw the coverlet off his bed and sat erect. He dropped

his head in his hands. He reviewed the events of the night which had passed.

Jerking his chin upward he stared around the room. The neat arrangement of his clothes and the cuff-links and cigarette-case on the stand showed that he had gone to bed fairly sober.

He sprang from the bed and stepped into a bath-room. He lathed himself under the flow of icy water. He rubbed-down with a coarse towel and started dressing himself.

He wondered if the valet had come back from the Cooks' and Housemaids' Ball. He thrust his arms through the sleeves of a lounging robe and started through the hallway in the direction of the library.

Parting the portières, he saw the evidence that Gallagher had returned to the apartment. The decanter and the cigar butts had been removed. A cheery fire burned in the porcelain grate. The table had been polished and the rugs swept clean of cigar ashes. There were sounds from the direction of the kitchenette that denoted preparations for breakfast. The dumb-waiter's door opened and then was slammed shut. Ice was thrust into the box. A milk-bottle clicked against another.

Vilos pressed a button on the wall near the fireplace.

Gallagher appeared.

"Morning, sir," said the alert valet.

"Good morning. You enjoyed yourself, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir! I 'ad a good time, sir."

"What hour did Colonel Bishop arrive?"

"Hit was about eleven o'clock, sir. I waited for 'im. I told 'im to make 'imself at 'ome. 'E was a bit tired, sir. Yes, sir, 'e was a bit tired."

"Did he say anything?"

"E did not, sir. 'E sat down in the big chair, there, and started drinking. 'E'd been 'aving an awful time with 'is 'ead, by the way 'e acted, sir."

Vilos glanced at the windows. He heard the rattle of the ash carts and the early morning traffic. It was the first movement of a city turning over, awakening and rising.

"You may bring the coffee and rolls,"

he said. "Serve them in here. Don't go to the colonel's room until I tell you."

The valet disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. Vilos glanced around the library. He allowed his eyes to swing from the bookcases to the ornaments in the glass cabinets. He studied each face of the pictures on the wall. They were his ancestors who had helped settle Missouri and Kentucky.

The coffee and rolls, with a small omelet, were brought in as he stood beneath his father's portrait. He turned and sat down when the valet drew up a chair before a small table near a window.

Finishing the meal, he rose, bunched his napkin, lighted a cigarette, and started for the hall-room where the colonel slept. There was a small, silk-shaded pilot-light glowing in the foyer entrance near the bedroom.

The door to this room was closed. Vilos pressed it open and stepped inside. The morning light streamed through a narrow window and brought out the details of the colonel's features.

The guardian of the Holbrook fortune had never been rated a handsome man. He appeared like a wreck on a pale shore. His nose was pressed deep within a fold of the pillow. His tiny, spiked beard and mustache was yellow-tinted and somewhat awry.

There was a stale odor in the room of alcohol and wine. Vilos stepped to the window and threw up the sash. He waited for the crisp, fresh air to awaken the colonel.

A slight movement under the covers was followed by a wide yawn. A choaking sounded. The old man hinged erect and stared about the room.

"Wake up!" said Vilos. "Get up and take a shower, colonel. What in thunder happened to you last night?"

"Last night? Good God, last night, yesterday!"

"Come on. Get up!"

Colonel Bishop closed his pouch-hung eyes. He opened them to narrow, burning slits.

"That you, Vilos?" he asked.

"Yes! It's me."

"I need a bracer, boy. A tumbler of whisky. Something has happened to me. It's unbelievable! It concerns the fortune your dear father left to me in trust for you."

Vilos stared at the old man.

"Get up from that bed!" he commanded. "Get up and explain what you just said. Have you been speculating?"

Vilos crammed his hands into the pockets of his lounging-robe and braced himself.

"All your money and all my money is gone," said the colonel as he swung his legs from under the coverlet and sat on the edge of the bed. "It's gone, boy."

"What do you mean?"

Colonel Bishop passed his hand over his eyes.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he said. "I wish I had a drink!"

Vilos frowned. "See here," he said, "you must explain yourself! I can't take your word that all of my money is gone. How did it go? What have got to show for it?"

The aged guardian rose and held himself erect by grasping the brass rail at the foot of the bed. He stared about the unfamiliar surroundings. He dropped his eyes to his spatted shoes under a chair. He raised his glance and steadied it upon Vilos.

"I met a stranger," he said slowly. "His name was Robert Bowdich. He seemed very pleasant."

"How long ago was this?"

"Three months ago. I invited him to my club. He was at a Red Cross dinner when I met him. He came down to my office soon afterward and we went out to lunch together. He had an automobile. At least, I suppose it was his."

"Go on! Go on!"

"We got acquainted. He knew some people that I did. He told me one day that he was looking for an engineer who had come on from Utah. This engineer had been given considerable stock for services rendered to the Small Hopes Mining and Milling Co. He made some kind of a report for the company."

"Are you sure it was the Small Hopes?"

"It was the Small Hopes of Utah, that I investigated. It was all right. The brokers offered to buy it in at two dollars a share."

"And you invested all my money in Small Hopes of Utah?"

"No!"

"What did you do? Be clear!"

Colonel Bishop reached and lifted his trousers. He drew these on as he swayed back and forth. He glanced about for his shoes.

"Come, now," said Vilos, "I want to hear more of what happened."

"I bought the stock from the sick engineer. He was living at the Hotel Aldwich. I happened to meet him accidentally. He had his daughter with him. They sold the stock for a dollar a share. Ninety thousand shares of it. I held it for a few days and then went down to the brokers. They told me—they told me there that I had Small Hopes stock of Arizona instead of Utah. The certificates looked the same."

"And Small Hopes of Arizona?"

"Isn't worth more than three cents a share. I was swindled!"

Vilos crammed his hands into the side pockets of his lounging-robe and paced the floor of the tiny room. He wheeled upon the old man and grasped him by the shoulder.

"It served you right!" he exclaimed. "But I don't see why you used my money. You tried to rob a mythical engineer, with a mythical daughter, I suppose. You fell in with a shrewd gang. What do you think father would say if he were living?"

Colonel Bishop had no answer for this question. He succeeded in getting into his clothes. He attempted to brush his hair and comb his mustache by aid of the half-light in the room. He turned with a weak effort to hold himself erect.

"You've notified the police?" asked Vilos.

"Yes! I talked with two detectives. I didn't tell them I had lost your money. I thought maybe they might arrest me if I did."

"They might have. This is an awkward situation for me, sir."

Colonel Bishop reached upward and

clutched Vilos's hand. "You'll have to forgive me, boy," he said. "I'm not myself this morning. I think one drink would steady my nerves. Then we can talk things over."

Vilos led the way into the library. He rang the bell for Gallagher. To the valet he said:

"Bring a small drink of Bourbon for Colonel Bishop. After that bring in some strong coffee and an omelet and some grape-fruit."

The aged guardian of the family sat down heavily and reached his hand toward the fireplace. He dropped his face in his palms.

Vilos strode over the rugs. He came back and stared at the colonel. There was little pity in his straightforward glance.

"Have you got the stock?" he asked.

"I left it with a detective."

"What did the man look like who first got you into this thing?"

"He looked like a prosperous merchant. He had been to Utah. He told me that the mine was very rich. It was—but the sick engineer sold me the wrong shares."

"It's a new game. You tried to double your money and mine by tricking an apparently sick man. Who was this man? Who was his daughter?"

"The man's name at the Hotel Aldwich was Findelason. His daughter's name was Clarice. She was his nurse. I really thought the engineer was dying."

Vilos brushed back his prematurely gray hair and bunched his fists. A sickening languor crept up his frame. He steadied himself with an effort.

"Was that the reason you tried to buy his stock cheaply?"

The colonel winced. He raised his head and dragged at the points of his mustache. He turned as Gallagher came into the library with a tray upon which was a single glass of whisky and a small chaser.

Gulping the drink in one swallow, he braced back his shoulders and handed the servant the empty glass.

"Water, sir?" asked the valet.

"No, no! Take it away!"

Vilos frowned.

"Boy," said the colonel, "I've been

through hell! I went to Atlantic City with Robert Bowdich. That was right after I bought the stock from the engineer. I suppose I was lured away so that they could cash my checks. I drank more than I ought to. Bowdich insisted on my being his guest. I realize the reason now."

"Did the detectives recognize any of the men from descriptions?"

"No! They said it was the work of an organized gang. It seems that other people have been fleeced by the same group of swindlers."

Vilos stepped aside as the valet appeared with the omelet, coffee, and grape-fruit on a tray.

"I'll telephone detective headquarters," he said.

Colonel Bishop fumbled with a white napkin. "You're not going to tell them that it was your money I used?"

"No! I'll just tell them to send up their best detective. There must be some way to run down this gang. Why, they've ruined us!"

The old man lifted a spoon and listened as Vilos raised the hook of the telephone and asked for police headquarters. The curtain between the library and the hall did not muffle the sound.

Vilos came back to the library.

"They're sending a man up," he said. "He's the same man you turned the stock over to. Sweeney is his name."

"Yes, that's the one. He's red headed, and I think he's looking out for himself. He intimated that he might do something for me if it was worth his while."

Vilos suddenly thought of Major Garrick.

"I got the man!" he exclaimed. "Garrick knows most of the people who live by their wits in this town. I'll send for him and have the two men meet. Perhaps the major can suggest who robbed you. I don't believe that there are many men who would answer the description you can give of Bowdich. Perhaps the major will know."

It was a half-hour later when the detective from police headquarters arrived. He was shown to the library door by Gallagher.

"How about Major Garrick?" asked Vilos.

Gallagher shook his head as he stepped into the room.

"Sorry, sir," he said; "but the major 'as a very important appointment. 'E said 'e would come any other time, sir. 'E says 'e's with a banker friend of 'is, sir. They're breakfasting at the club."

"Did you tell him that Colonel Bishop was swindled?"

"Hi did, sir. 'E seemed very much surprised. 'E said that 'e would like to see you in private about the matter." Gallagher glanced at the colonel as if the major had said more over the phone than could be repeated.

"That 'll do," said Vilos turning toward Sweeney. "Come in," he added. "I thought insomuch as I was concerned in the swindle, or my entire fortune was, that I had better have an understanding with you. I want you to get those swindlers and bring them to justice. What right had they to escape so easily? What has the detective department done in the matter?"

"Say!" exclaimed the detective. "Say, young fellow, I don't know who you are, and I don't care. This man here comes to us with a long tale of gettin' trimmed by a beautiful nurse, a sick engineer, and an old boy with pink whiskers. Now, that might all be true. We looked up the Hotel Aldwich's register. The man and nurse, or daughter, have gone. The Atlantic City police wired that Bowditch was there. He paid his bill and left. That's all we have got to go on. What do you expect us to do with that information?"

"You have the stock!" said Vilos hotly. "You can find out where the checks were cashed."

"The stock can be bought from any curb-stone broker for two ~~cents~~ a share. There were three million shares issued of Small Hopes of Arizona."

"Then the checks?"

"The checks were indorsed on the back by Colonel Bishop. All the crooks did was to present them and walk away with the money."

Vilos turned toward the colonel.

"Did you indorse them?"

"I think I did. I was drinking, and didn't remember."

"How did it happen that you had all that cash in one bank?"

"I sold the mortgages and bonds so that I would be ready with the cash in case the engineer would part with his shares."

Sweeney grinned and threw down both hands.

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "There's one like the colonel born every minute. You haven't got a chance to get that money back. I bet it went twenty ways. Those mobs are made up of all kinds of actors."

"What would you advise, then?" asked Vilos.

"Forget it!"

"I'll see the commissioner first! You people are supposed to protect the public."

"The public be—"

Vilos glanced at the detective. He appeared to be a very assured individual, who had gained his experience in a city where competition is keenest. His eyes had already taken in the details of the apartment. He had mentally weighed and appraised every piece of furniture and bric-a-brac.

The colonel rose from the table where he had been eating and advanced toward Sweeney.

"You'd help an old man out?" he asked. "That money was placed with me in trust by my dearest friend. This boy hasn't a cent left in the world."

Sweeney glanced at Vilos's gray-sprinkled head. "He looks as if he can take care of himself," he said. "I'll give you some good advice. It may lead to the recovery of some of the money. Offer a big reward. The reward will be conditional on you getting back some of the stolen cash. Then we can all get busy."

"Won't the detectives work without a reward?" asked Vilos.

"Sure they'll work! We're working all the time. But a personal ad in a paper has done wonders in cases like this. Suppose the mob fall out? Suppose there's a squealer in the bunch? Suppose somebody in the gang figures they didn't get a big enough bit out of the swag?"

"Yes, we'll offer a reward," said Colonel Bishop.

"Now you're talking," said Sweeney. "How much?"

"Five thousand," suggested Vilos.

"Better make it ten,"

"We'll consult on the matter when you are gone."

Sweeney drew down his hat and turned toward the curtains. He hesitated for a brief second.

"I'll give you another good tip," he said as his eyes ranged over the hall and the portières. "This is a sure-fire one."

"And what is it?" asked Vilos, leaning toward the detective.

"Let the colonel stroll around the cabaret and sporting section of town. Have him watch everybody. I'll hand in my badge if he don't see one of the gang that trimmed him in that time. They can't keep away from this city."

Sweeney nodded his head. He stepped through the curtains and let them fall.

"Show him out," said Vilos to Gallagher. "His last suggestion was a good one. We'll remember it, Sweeney."

"It never failed," chuckled the detective.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE FINGER OF GUILT."

COLONEL BISHOP left the flat at 3 P.M. He had sobered up and presented a respectable exterior to the world he was about to face.

Sweeney's suggestion concerning laying in wait for the men who had stolen the fortune was worth adopting. Vilos had telephoned a lawyer who promised to use whatever influence he could in the matter of rounding up the swindlers.

Night's shades came down the air-shaft and through the windows before Vilos had gained complete control of himself. The colonel's repeated statements concerning the robbery furnished scant clues to work upon. The band of swindlers had probably scattered over the country. There was the first chance that one of their number might stroll through the cabaret district. In this event the colonel would be on hand to notify the detective department.

Vilos made an inventory of his assets. They were scant enough. The money

which the colonel held in trust had vanished. There was a small bank account of a few hundred dollars and the furnishings of the flat to fall back upon.

He studied these furnishings and grew blue with the thought of parting from the old things which had really made life worth while. The bay of the front room contained the heterogeneous luxuries of the Orient. He had traveled over the old routes, and had gathered numerous things which matched his tastes and inclinations.

The rugs had been bought at Agua and Benares. There was one from Daghestan. The portières and curtains had enriched a peer's yacht, who had been sold out at Christie's in London. Five paintings by Gérôme and Scherer represented scenes from the desert. Odd objects of ivory and white jade were scattered about the front room and the library. There was an onyx paper-cutter on a mound of envelopes. There was a dragon carved from a tusk. Over the bookcase ran a row of tankards—like German soldiers—fat and thirsty. Around about, on tables and stands, were limp-leather portfolios filled with music and poems.

Vilos knew that many of these objects would not bring their worth at auction. He called Gallagher and instructed him to pack everything portable inside of three days. The books and personal objects were to go in boxes. The whole apartment was to be made ready for the ruthless hand of an auctioneer.

Gallagher stared at his master and gulped. He brushed a genuine tear from his eye. He went back to the kitchen and pulled a cork from a bottle. He sat down and forgot the cares of this life in an alcoholic dream that lasted out the night.

Vilos stopped wandering about the apartment—stopped fingering objects that had taken him so many years to accumulate. He squared his somewhat narrow shoulders and glided through to the front windows. He glanced out.

The night view was of the best. A shimmering road ran below him, streaked with auto lights and a long line of flaming arcs. A belt of green marked a park which sloped like an emerald field down to the

river. North, over the house-tops, a monument loomed in white purity. South, towered row on row of apartment buildings with turrets and towers clear-cut against the velvet of the night sky.

He turned away. He glanced helplessly toward the narrow vista of the apartment. A few silk-shaded lights were lit. He studied these. His eyes dropped to the rugs. They swung along the line of book-cases and the morocco-bound volumes.

He crammed his hands in the pockets of his lounging robe and strode to his room.

There he dressed carefully in a dark suit. He found an overcoat on the hall-tree. Putting this on and selecting a soft hat, he went out and down the elevator.

Major Garrick was in the Primrose Club when he entered, after a long walk downtown.

"Hello!" said the beaming major over his shoulder as he folded up the cards he held and indicated that he would pass the hand. "Hello, Holbrook! Sorry I wasn't able to come over when your man called. What's that he was telling me about Colonel Bishop? Nothing serious, I hope."

"I'd like to see you," said Vilos.

"I can't very well leave the game now. Suppose you wait in the reading-room?"

Vilos nodded, bowed to the men about the table, and made his way to the reading-room. He sat down and looked over the current magazines. He glanced at his watch now and then. Eleven o'clock chimed in the little gold time-piece over the mantle.

A thought struck him that he no longer heard voices from the direction of the card-room. He rose and glanced through the doorway. The swift blood surged through his veins. Major Garrick, a lifelong friend, had hastened from the club, and had avoided the appointment.

Vilos took the matter as an indication of other insults to follow. The major had heard, or surmised, that his fortune had been lost. Other men would shun him for the same reason.

Striding swiftly from the club, he spent the evening wandering through the park. He finally crossed the town and entered a hotel near his apartment.

The bartender nodded and passed out the old bottle of private-stock. Vilos glanced at it and took a stiff drink. He tossed down the exact change and went out.

His thoughts cleared. There was little to do save to sell the contents of the flat, pack the rest away, send Gallagher off with good references, and then seek more modest lodgings in a cheaper quarter.

It was possible that the detective department would run down the swindlers. It was hardly possible, however, that they would succeed in getting back much of the money. As Sweeney had said, it had probably gone many ways.

Vilos went home and to bed. He woke refreshed from a deep, twelve-hour sleep. He found Gallagher in the midst of packing. He passed the morning making arrangements with moving people, storage warehouses, and an auctioneer, who promised to send an appraiser up as soon as one came in.

Leaving everything to Gallagher's judgment, Vilos dressed and started out. The thought had gripped him that there might be something gained by paying a visit to the Gipsy. She had intimated that she knew more of the major than she dared repeat. She had a speaking acquaintance with many of the members of the flash underworld. She might know who had robbed Colonel Bishop of the money.

He entered a telephone-booth. He found her address by deduction. There were three Cragens in the book. One was a merchant, one was an auto dealer, the other's address was given as on the east side of the town.

Vilos took a street-car and finished the journey on foot. He found the address, which was an ancient, brown-stone tenement.

It was commonly known in the city as a "walk-up." He searched the mail-boxes and found one marked "Cragen."

Climbing three flights of gas-illuminated stairs, he came to a fourth landing, upon which were two doors. He knocked at one, then tried the other. A silence was followed by footsteps. A key turned. The Gipsy appeared. She stared through the half-opened door at Vilos.

"Hello!" he said. "How do you do, Miss Cragen?"

"Oh, it is you! I wondered if I ever would see you."

"I never forgot that dance and the warning you gave me at the Three Students' Ball."

She smiled. "I'd ask you in," she said; "but I think it would be better if we went for a walk. Will you wait until I get my coat?"

Vilos nodded. A minute passed. The Gipsy appeared in a long, tan coat and a blue hat.

"Let's go down-stairs," she said. "Father is not well. You don't mind going outdoors, do you?"

Her eyes made a rapid inventory of his dark overcoat and well-cut clothes. She glanced up, then bent her head toward the stairway.

"Oh, all right!" Vilos said. "I'd rather walk. It isn't too cold for a long one either."

She led the way down the three flights of steps and out upon the street. She turned and hooked her right arm in his as he hesitated and glanced east and west.

"Let's go where the lights are," she urged. "I hate this neighborhood."

He reviewed what he wanted to say to her as they crossed the avenues and approached a secluded park.

"I called," he finally said, "just because I couldn't quite forget you or what you told me when we had that dance at the Three Students' Ball."

"What did I tell you?"

"To keep away from Major Garrick."

"Is he your friend?"

"He was, but now since I lost my money I don't believe he is."

She drew her arm from his and walked along in silence until they had reached an avenue. She turned and faced him on the corner.

"Let's go to some restaurant or tea-room," she suggested. "I want to know about you losing your money. It must have been sudden. The major said, after you left, that you had an independent income."

"Would it make any difference to you?"

"To me? No! Everybody I know is

poor. I've worked and even danced for a living. I keep the flat for father."

"Is he your only relative?"

"Yes—mother is dead. Father earns enough to make ends meet—sometimes a little more."

Vilos caught a slight note of hardness in the girl's voice. He glanced at her. The lines of her mouth were drawn down. The lips were straight with thought.

"We'll go to the Old Bombay Tea-Room," he said. "We can talk things over there. I don't think we exactly understand each other. I have a premonition it is going to be awfully hard for us to get acquainted. Our worlds are not the same."

She laughed and flashed him a sudden glance. "Oh, if you're broke," she said, "and want a friend to take around, now and then, and a pal, I'm willing. There's only one man in this town I despise. I hate him because I do. You know whom I mean?"

"Mike Dugan!"

She nodded and led the way across the avenue. She stood on the curb and glanced swiftly at the throng of pedestrians that surged about the trolley stations. There was a haunting fear in her eyes.

They walked to the tea-room. He held her chair and took her coat. He ordered some waffles and a large pot of tea.

"Now tell me," he asked as the waitress disappeared. "Tell me why you are afraid of Mike Dugan and of Major Garrick? Have they any hold on you or your father?"

"They have more than a hold—they own him body and soul."

"But what is his business? What does your father work at?"

She toyed with her napkin. "He never worked," she said, flushing. "He's an instrument in the hands of a master. I can't tell you anything more, except that I have tried desperately hard to reform him. I've tried to be a lady. How can I? I haven't the education. I was sent after a growler of beer before I knew the alphabet. I still go after growlers of beer! 'High hats,' father calls them."

Vilos leaned back. He, too, toyed with his napkin. Their glances met and locked. His was the first to drop.

"You're frank," he said, staring at the white damask. "I thought when I heard you give that toast to Bubbles that there was something more to you than the other girls I've met."

"And now you've changed your mind."

"Yes, for the better. You seem to be too sincere. I suppose you wouldn't have told me about the high hats if you weren't."

"Suppose I told you I was a thief?"

Vilos dropped his napkin. She had brought out the word with direct emphasis. He glanced over the tea-room before meeting her eyes.

"You're not that," he said, trying to fathom the depths of her earnestness. "You'd never be one unless you were forced to it."

"Suppose I was forced to it?"

"You don't mean that your father—"

She turned her head. She exposed an olive-shaded wealth of skin which disappeared beneath a collar of white lace.

"Here's the tea," she said.

"You haven't answered my question," he said as the waitress vanished.

"*A votre santé,*" she mispronounced as she lifted a glass of water. "I learned that from a French chauffeur. He used to come and take me riding. That's all the French I know. I was eleven years old then. I'm over twenty now."

Vilos sipped his tea and wondered at her frankness.

"I didn't think you were more than eighteen."

Her blush was genuine. She shaded her lashes over her deep-blue eyes. She smiled faintly. She lowered her glance to his right hand, which lay upon the damask. She watched him tapping the edge of the table with his polished finger-nails.

"What are you looking at?" he asked, conscious of her stare.

"Your fingers."

"Why?"

She closed her lips. A reflective expression crept over her face.

"Why?" he repeated.

"Oh, because."

"Because why?"

"I've seen professionals with hands exactly like yours."

"Pianists?"

"No."

"What sort of professionals?"

"Card-sharpers and—"

"Thanks," said Vilos dryly. "I'm not a card-sharper or a—what else were you going to suggest?"

"To be frank," she said as she glanced at his hand, "I have seen pickpockets who had shorter fingers than you have."

"Good Lord! Pickpockets?"

"Yes; they are wonderfully gifted. They can lift a poke or weed a leather or steal a watch without anybody feeling anything."

Vilos did not know whether she had complimented him or not. He drew his hands from view. He leaned over the table.

"I'll remember that," he said. "I have got a chance to make money, after all. I thought my talents were limited to electrical engineering. I have got to go to work at something."

"You mustn't think I was in earnest. I don't believe that you would steal."

Vilos shook his head. He leaned back as the waitress arrived with the waffles. He poured out more tea and caught the girl's glance upon his fingers.

"You flatter me," he said, passing over her cup. "You really do. I was never cut out for a pickpocket."

"We never know what we are cut out for. I should have been an actress. I was always crazy to go on the stage. Then I thought of the movies. But there's father and the flat. I just drift along."

He stared at her face. It had become wistful. The pucker at her mouth was very inviting.

"I'm going to call on you often," he said. "I'll get a job as soon as I sell the things at the apartment. Some of them I'll pack and place in a storage-warehouse. I can make thirty or thirty-five a week at engineering."

"How did you lose your money?" She broke off a piece of waffle and lifted it between her fingers.

"I lost it in a swindle. You see, I have an uncle who is too easy for this world. He is my guardian. I'd always drawn checks on him and had them honored. The other night he came in and waited for me.

It was the same night, or morning, that I met you at the Three Students' Ball. He explained how he had got mixed up with a gang who fleeced him out of all his and all my money. Their game was simple. Do you want to hear about it?"

She paled slightly. He noticed her pallor as she leaned into an alcove.

"Yes," she whispered. "I'm always interested in those things."

Vilos hesitated. The air of the tiny tea-room had suddenly grown tense. He had called upon the Gipsy to ask her opinion concerning the swindle. He hardly knew how to approach the subject.

"You see," he said, "there were three in it, as far as I can find out. One was a sick engineer, who was registered at the Hotel Aldwich as a Mr. Findelason from Utah. The other was his nurse or daughter. The third was named Robert Bowdich. Uncle met Mr. Bowdich at a Red Cross dinner. Why, what's the matter?"

Vilos rose. He almost upset his chair as the girl clapped her handkerchief to her lips and stared across the table at him as if he had accused her of the crime.

"I—" he started to say.

"Oh, this is awful! Are you Colonel Bishop's heir?"

"He's my guardian," stammered Vilos. "What do you know about the swindle?"

The girl lowered her napkin. There was a scarlet stain which showed double upon the white surface. She straightened her chair. She reached a wavering hand for her coat. "Please pay the check, and let's go out," she said. "I can't stand it in here any longer. Please! Please!"

Vilos glanced about the room. He helped the Gipsy on with her coat. He found his own and his hat. He left a two-dollar bill for the waitress.

The crisp night air cleared his brain. He linked arms and turned toward the lights of the town.

"What do you know about the swindle?" he repeated.

"Nothing! Nothing! Take me home."

"But—"

"Take me home! Take me to the cross-town car. Leave me and never try to see me again. You must! You must!"

"But I don't understand what happened."

"Nothing happened, Mr. Holbrook. I must go home. That's all. Now leave me!"

They reached the intersection of two thoroughfares. A surface car clanged over the switch-points and stopped to discharge passengers. The Gipsy drew her arm away from Vilos, flashed him a final, startled glance, and then ran for the rear platform of the car. She climbed aboard.

Vilos stood still. He watched the cross-town car going toward the east. He turned. A man hurried up to his side.

"What were you doing with that woman?" asked an accusing voice. "That girl—that thief?"

"What!" exclaimed Vilos as he wheeled upon Colonel Bishop.

"The lady you were with?" queried the aged guardian. "Why, I've been watching for her all day. She's the one that played the part of the nurse to the sick engineer in the Hotel Aldwich. She helped rob us!"

"Impossible!"

"I'd know that pretty face of hers in a million!" declared the colonel. "She's the queen of swindlers!"

CHAPTER V.

BABES OF GRACE.

VILOS reached out his hand and laid it on Colonel Bishop's excited shoulder.

"You are mistaken," he said. "That young lady I just left is the very soul of honor. She couldn't be the one who acted as a nurse to the sick engineer who robbed you. You're entirely wrong."

Colonel Bishop stared at the lights of the vanishing car. He took one step in its direction, then hesitated. Some of his assurance vanished as he noted Vilos's steady poise.

"She was the one," he said, "that was in the engineer's room at the Hotel Aldwich. Why, boy, I'd know her in the dark!"

Vilos shook his head. He felt the colonel's fingers on his arm.

"Let's go and tell the detective," suggested the old man. "He will be under that arc-light."

Vilos followed his uncle through the traffic to where Detective-Sergeant Sweeney stood.

The detective was intently watching the row of faces which flowed down a brightly lighted avenue.

The colonel grasped his arm. He swung him partly around. Sweeney's eyes swept from the old man's form to Vilos.

"Hello, Holbrook!" he said. "What's comin' off?"

"I just left a young lady whom the colonel accuses of being one of the gang who stole our money. I'm sure she wasn't!"

Sweeney eyed the colonel. He thrust his thumbs into the holes of his vest.

"He ought to know," he said. "Holbrook ought to know the kind of company he keeps, colonel."

"I say it was the nurse in the Hotel Aldwich!" said the colonel. "I repeat that it was the same woman!"

"And I say the girl I was with is the soul of honor!" insisted Vilos.

"You're a hell o' a help to us, if she was the same woman." The detective stared keenly at Vilos. "Which way did she go? Where does she live? Are you trying to cover up something?"

Vilos saw the glint of steel in the man-hunter's eyes. They flashed a momentary suggestion of savagery. The great red brows shelfed down. The thumbs came away from the vest holes.

"Where does this woman live?" he repeated.

A few rounders and theater-ticket speculators edged toward the group of men. Some of them knew Sweeney. They believed that an arrest was about to be made.

Vilos twisted away from the detective's grip. He doubled his fists.

"See here!" he said. "See here, I'm perfectly sure of my own business! I met that girl at a—at a tea-room. I don't know who she was or where she lives. She got on the cross-town car. That's all there is to it. The colonel was mistaken. He's near-sighted."

"You better beat it," growled Sweeney.

"You want me to help you, and you block the trail at the first chance. I got other people to look after."

The colonel cursed helplessly. He followed Vilos. They stood before the lights of a motion-picture theater.

"You had better quit watching," said Vilos. "Go to your club and forget the matter. I'm going home and help Gallagher pack up my things."

"But that girl?"

"She wasn't the one you met in the Hotel Aldwich. I'll answer for her, colonel. Now, think, are you sure?"

"She had the same face—the same walk—the same tan coat. I saw it in the sick engineer's room. She is the same woman!"

Vilos had pressed the point in order to determine how much the colonel remembered about the matter. He gripped the old man's hand and said earnestly:

"Don't drink too much! I'll come down to your office to-morrow. Forget the girl! Good-by!"

He turned as he saw the colonel tug at his mustache, then moisten dry lips and start for the garish lights of a saloon.

"Just a second, uncle!" he said, hurrying across the sidewalk. "What description did you give Sweeney of the sick engineer? What did Findelason look like? Did he have a scar on his cheek? Was he a big man with a heavy face and deep blue eyes?"

"No, boy. He was thin-faced and black-eyed. He hadn't been shaved for weeks. He had a terrible cough. I was certain he was dying."

"Good-by!" said Vilos. "I'll call you up at your office to-morrow."

The colonel stared after the vanishing form of his ward.

"He was with the woman, all right," he said. "Now, why did he deny it?"

Vilos had asked concerning the sick engineer on the chance that the description might fit the Gipsy's father. It did not. Cragen was probably not involved in the swindling of the colonel.

The walk up-town settled a number of things in his mind. He had struck an unexpected clue which was both sweet and bitter. The Gipsy had played the part of the nurse in the Hotel Aldwich. Her com-

panion in the swindle was unknown. The genial individual who had lured the colonel to Atlantic City was still to be discovered. He decided to hurry with the packing of his things, sell the furniture, settle down in a quiet boarding-house, and ferret out the affair so that he could recover a part of the stolen fortune.

He made swift work of the packing. Gallagher shed a few tears over the objects of art as they were wrapped up and placed in trunks and cases. The auctioneer arrived, and with him came three appraisers. The figure they offered was one-fifth what Vilos had paid for the furnishings of the flat. He accepted it and received a check.

Moving swiftly, he sent Gallagher off with the trunks and boxes. He bade good-bye to the superintendent, and paid the one month's rent which was due on the lease. He went through the old rooms, called up the telephone company, ordered the telephone discontinued, then went down the elevator and left the keys with the girl at the switchboard.

That evening he crawled into a narrow bed of a select boarding-house which was sandwiched between a theater's side door and a lady's tailoring establishment of the superior order. The die was cast. He had come down from plenty to the bare necessities of life. The transformation had taken place in brief time. The city roared on as if the event was not worth recording. Vilos drowsed and slept through a night of useless memories.

The problem he faced in the morning was the old, old one of a man taking stock of himself. He sat on the edge of the bed and had it out with his conscience. He could go to work at electrical engineering and earn, at the most, thirty-five dollars a week. There were a number of firms in the city who would be glad to employ him.

On the other hand, he had a little money and a wide assurance that he would be able to force the Gipsy to give the names of her confederates, or assist him in the partial recovery of the Holbrook fortune.

He decided on this line of action. Gallagher had been taken care of with a very good reference. The colonel had a small office in a down-town building where he

specialized in stocks and bonds and financial advice to investors. It was not much, but the colonel's expenses were small.

Vilos rose from the bed and dressed. He decided to start the investigation by going to the Primrose Club and waiting for Major Garrick. The major had a working knowledge of the police, their methods; and he also was on speaking-terms with many denizens of the higher underworld. He would be able to tell more about the Gipsy.

The doorman of the club nodded to Vilos and bowed him in. The footman took his coat, hat, and stick. He hurried through the card-room and the reading-room. No one was about that part of the club. He passed through to the elevator and was lifted to the second floor, where a number of breakfasters were sitting with their newspapers propped over their grape-fruit.

Major Garrick, resplendent in a shepherd-plaid suit and a red tie, glanced across a tiny table which was set well in an alcove by the front windows.

"Good morning," he said as Vilos stared at him. "Come, sit down and join me! I hate to eat alone."

Vilos stood erect until a waiter drew up a chair. He sat down and indicated to the servant that he had breakfasted.

"How's tricks?" asked the major, poising a fork. "What *did* happen to your uncle? Let's see, his name was Bishop—wasn't it? I think you told me about him once."

"That's what I came about," said Vilos. "That's what I wanted to see you about the other night. He was robbed, and I thought you might know who did it?"

"I?"

"Yes! It was the work of a clever gang. They had a sick engineer and a nurse and a steerer who took my uncle to Atlantic City."

The major flushed beneath his pink skin. He crossed his legs and touched a napkin to his mouth. His fingers trembled slightly as he laid the napkin down. "How much did they get from your uncle?" he asked.

"Seventy thousand dollars. Almost all of it was mine. My uncle was the guardian of my father's estate."

"And the old man fell for the sick engineer's game?"

"He did!" said Vilos.

"It's a wonder to me, Holbrook, they don't appoint guardians for guardians these days. I don't know any quicker way of losing money. I suppose he bought stock which was worthless. I presume he tried to do somebody else and got done himself. I always did like to see a sucker trimmed."

Vilos glanced around the room. He had detected a quizzical note in the major's voice.

"Do you happen to know any gang operating that swindle?" he asked. "Can you give me any clue by which I can recover the money?"

The major reached and lifted a glass of ice water. He gulped twice before he set it down and leaned forward.

"Have you a good description of the men in the swindle?"

"Fairly good," said Vilos. "The girl was blue-eyed and had dark hair. The man who lured my uncle to Atlantic City was a genial, stout, gray-haired individual with a ready smile."

"That would fit my description," said the major. "But then there are many men besides myself whom it would also fit."

The major smiled genially. He beamed and stroked his whiskers. "I think I can help you," he said with a hearty voice. "I'll see a certain party who knows everybody in the swindling line. He's a wonder! He goes deep-sea on the boats, and they let him in on all their games. He's a sort of *dilettante* on international swindling. You give me your address and I'll send you a list of probable suspects."

Vilos wrote the address of his boarding-house on a card and passed it to the major.

"You're a very determined young man," said Major Garrick. "I think you are up against a hard problem, though. This is a large town. The world is so wide. Why, I've heard that the very best place to look for swindlers and green-goods men and con-men and deep-sea Greeks and wire-tappers is the lobby of about ten good hotels, stretching from here to Cairo and Tokyo and Frisco. They are babes of grace and migrate with astonishing rapidity."

"Babes of grace, major?"

"Yes! Occasional offenders who are in

the crime-game for the sport that is in it. Now, for instance, what did that sick engineer look like? I'd like to make a bet he's an actor."

"He was dark-bearded and slim—" Vilos started to say when the major was interrupted by the arrival of a page with a card.

"Show him up!" he said. "Tell Mr. Hickson I'm holding place for him."

Vilos rose hurriedly.

"Sit right down," said the major. "I want you to meet Mr. Hickson. Handles stocks and bonds. He is a bit of a sportsman—but a good sort, you know."

Vilos turned. He saw a loud-voiced man swing into the breakfast-room. A cream-colored pair of spats matched a hat of the same shade. A dainty bamboo cane was hooked over an arm. A black mustache of two-weeks' growth shaded a thick upper lip. Beaded eyes as bright as a serpent's glided and darted from table to table. They swept the major's portly form as he rose and said:

"Mr. Hickson, meet Mr. Holbrook—an old club friend of mine. Mr. Holbrook was just telling me that his uncle was robbed by a clever band of swindlers. You should hear the details."

The dark eyes rested upon Vilos. They bored through and through him.

"Glad to know you," said Hickson, thrusting out a cool, slim-fingered hand. "Frien' of the major's is a frien' o' mine. Ain't many like the major. He's a filly for looks and as steady as a deacon."

Vilos bowed slightly. He felt somewhat out of his element. The two men had that hardness which repulses with its very brilliancy.

"This swindle?" asked Hickson as he handed his cane and hat to the waiter. "How did it come off?"

"His uncle," said the major, "got mixed up with a mob who sold him some bogus mining stock. Not the kind you handle, you know, but cat-and-dog stuff."

"What was his uncle's name?"

"Bishop!" said Major Garrick solemnly.

"Mr. Bishop, if you please!"

"I'll remember that," Hickson said, sitting down very suddenly. "In the mean time, major, we might have a cocktail."

Vilos waited until three drinks were brought to the table. Then he rose.

"You send the information to the address I gave you," he said, leaning over the table. "Perhaps Mr. Hickson can help you out in *that* matter."

The major almost choked. He stared at the face of his companion, then up at Vilos.

"What d'you mean?" he asked.

"What I said!" exclaimed Vilos as he moved away from the table and started blindly for the door. He found the elevator and descended to the main floor of the club. He was handed his stick, coat, and hat. He plunged through the doorway and started walking rapidly toward the north.

The truth, or a glimmering of the truth, had come home to him. He followed the natural sequence and found no flaw in his reasoning. The colonel had been robbed by men who had decided he was a mark. The work savored of Major Garrick. The genial major had posed as Mr. Robert Bowditch. He had told the gullible colonel of the sick engineer somewhere in the town. Mr. Hickson, who answered the engineer's description, had played his rôle with the help of the Gipsy. The entire swindle dovetailed. The meeting with Hickson had started the train of deduction in Vilos's mind.

He reached a park and sat down on a bench. His stick lay between his custom-made shoes. His eyes were on the trees and the sky. There was an open space there as if some giant monarch had fallen. This space represented his faith in man. The double-dealing of the major had proved the last straw.

There seemed no way to wrest the money from the gang. Its one weak spot was the Gipsy. She would not talk.

He lifted his cane and swung it idly back and forth. Women in green suits and broad, black hats galloped by on well-groomed horses. Autos honked beyond the fringe of shrubbery. The sun's rays slanted through the shrubbery and cast shadows over the cement walk.

Vilos steadied his cane. He rose with sudden resolve. There was nothing to be gained by guesswork. There was a way to prove if Hickson and the major were concerned in the swindle.

He had thought of telephoning Colonel Bishop and having the old man come to the club in order to identify the two men. He realized that if the police were brought in on the matter there would be a scandal which would involve the Gipsy.

His decision was to go to the tenement and lay the matter before her. She could advise him. He held certain cards which might force her to tell the truth.

He walked rapidly through the park and crossed the town. He sprang on the rear end of a street-car which would take him south. He got off the car and walked west.

Through screaming children and red-faced women he threaded until he stood in the entrance to the brown-stone tenement. Cragen's box was filled with circulars. Vilos pressed the bell and waited. He saw dirt-streaked urchins peering through the entrance at him. They eyed his cane as if they had never seen one.

A burly man came down the steps and opened the door. He had a can under his coat.

"Is Cragen in?" asked Vilos. "I want to see Miss Cragen."

"Cragen's gone," the man said thickly. "He moved away last night. The daughter went with him."

"Where did they go?" asked Vilos blankly.

"You can search me—I don't know. Down-town, I guess. Was youse a friend of theirs?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, then, youse oughta know where they went. I wasn't a friend of any of them. Queer people, I say."

Vilos followed the man out into the street. He glanced up at the rows of broken windows. He counted until he had reached the fourth floor. There was a series of three empty windows there. The curtains had been removed.

"Would the agent know?" Vilos asked the man.

"I'm the agent. I tended to the taking out of their telephone. I don't know where they went. I don't care."

Vilos tucked his cane under his arm. He started westward. He entered a slot-booth and called up Colonel Bishop. The old man

promised to be at the Primrose Club within fifty minutes. His voice shook as he attempted to hang up the receiver.

It was exactly fifty-five minutes when the colonel sprang out of a taxi and came across the sidewalk to the place where Vilos was waiting on the corner nearest the club.

"Are you certain they are the men who swindled me?" asked the old man excitedly. "Suppose they are not?"

"I'll introduce you," said Vilos. "That will prove the matter."

"Hadn't we better telephone for Sweeney and have him waiting outside in case of trouble?"

"No! Come on in! They were in the breakfast-room. They ought to be in the library now. Come on, uncle!"

Vilos led the way into the club. He stopped and peered into the card-room. He grasped the colonel's arm and urged him to the library. No one save a bald-headed reader was in sight.

Vilos frowned and stepped to the waiting elevator-boy.

"Did you see Major Garrick and a friend come down?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I did, Mr. Holbrook. They came down about an hour ago, sir. They talked with the secretary, sir. Then they went out, sir."

"And where is the secretary?"

"He's not around, sir. He went out, sir."

"With Major Garrick."

"Oh, no, sir! He went afterward, sir. I heard him say that the major was leaving for Asia, or some place like that. The porter brought down the major's bags and golf-sticks and things, sir."

"And he left in a taxi?"

"He did, sir."

Vilos stared at Colonel Bishop. He drew out a quarter and handed it to the boy. He led the way to the street where he said bitterly:

"I frightened them away!"

"Then they were the men who swindled me?"

"Their flight proves it!" declared Vilos. "I suppose the money will be all spent by the time they return. I'll have to go to work—or—"

"Or what, boy?"

Vilos glanced at his right hand.

"Or hunt up the Gipsy," he said.

CHAPTER VI.

"FLANNAGAN'S FLATS."

VILOS fell into the idle life of a dreamer and a wanderer. He browsed through book stores and spent his evenings strolling within the congested canons of the city.

The boarding-house, with its score or more of tenants, was a hive of loud laughter, cabbage smells, and white-faced women who flitted through the halls in the morning, with their beauty strangely gone over the night.

Vilos had a speaking acquaintance with a few of the steady boarders. They belonged to the "trolley-circuit," which consisted of a number of vaudeville houses scattered conveniently near the trolley lines.

He gravely listened to them and caught a new note in the heart of the city. They were courageous and enterprising. They had traveled everywhere in the United States. The city was considered a godsend compared to one-night stands at sage-brush hotels.

Their high good-nature and care-free life caused him to take stock of his own somewhat narrow existence. He went out more often. He visited the Primrose Club at stated evenings. His return to the boarding-house in full dress and crush-opera hat, a trifle out of fashion, was usually heralded by a voice from somewhere over the banister and an invitation to come up and have some beer.

Once a chalk-pale youth, who had cloistered himself in a third-floor back room, was brought down between two heavy-set men and was seen no more at the boarding-house. The jimmie-jawed landlady said that he never had to worry any more about board bills.

Vilos found it necessary to first call upon Colonel Bishop for money, and then, shortly afterward, he had the trunks and boxes brought from the storage warehouse and their contents sold at auction.

The jade and jasper and ivory had depreciated. Some of the cherished objects of art brought less than he had paid for duty on them. It was a frugal period where luxuries were a drug on the market. He kept the portraits and paintings. These would not sell, and they were the last of his blue-china, as he phrased it.

He found in his wanderings a little café and restaurant which suited him in cuisine and price. It was managed by a father, a mother, and a pretty daughter who waited on the tables. There was a bar in the front, but this did not prevent the place from being both respectable and popular. It had not been spoiled by sightseers.

A night came when he sat in this little café and stared over the tables toward the heavy, slate-gray face and eyes of Mike Dugan. There could be no doubt that it was the boss.

Vilos drew back against a wall. He partly hid his form by interposing a pillar between himself and Dugan, who was dining with a henchman of swarthy features and oily black hair.

The boss was drinking lithia water. He was eating spaghetti with an awkward fork. He had evidently dropped into the café on a ward tour.

The Gipsy's name and features flashed through Vilos's mind. He had given up the quest for her. The sight of Dugan brought back the picture of the girl dancing at the Three Students' Ball. It stirred the old memories and the haunting sweetness of their last parting.

He wondered if it were only yesterday or six months ago when he had visited the tenement. He had idled the time and got nowhere. The major and his unsavory friend, Mr. Hickson, had not been seen around the Primrose Club. Sweeney still stood at the intersection of the thoroughfares.

Vilos finished his small bottle of red wine. He ordered a stronger drink. He had taken to drinking as a means to pass the nights and days. Whisky, he found, let the brakes off in a remarkable manner. And whisky was cheap in the city.

He watched Dugan and the black-haired henchman. They rose before he had finished

the whisky. He hastily gulped the remainder, paid the waiter, and started toward the front of the café.

Dugan stopped and talked with the pretty daughter. He was approached by a youth in velveteen jacket who attempted to sell him some "soul candy." The big boss roared an indignant protest which set the gay spot of bohemia into laughter. He glanced around, leered at the pretty daughter, then passed out through the door.

Vilos leaned over the bar and ordered a drink. He gulped this, threw down a quarter, and braced his shoulders as he trailed Dugan and his companion under a narrow Elevated.

The way led southward to Harmine Street. Dugan stopped and started whispering instructions to the Italian. The two men stood blurred against the lights from a saloon. They separated as Dugan pushed open the doors and stepped inside.

Vilos crossed the street and rounded the corner. He entered a back room and peered over the low door which separated the room from the bar. Dugan stood before a table. He was glancing at a man whose face was scarred and whose black clothes were shiny. It was a full minute before Vilos realized that the man to whom the boss was talking was James Cragen—the Gipsy's father.

Vilos stepped out of the saloon. He took up a position on the opposite side of the street. He turned his coat collar up to his chin and drew down his soft hat.

Children stared at him and went on. Women passed with fetching coughs which were meant to be invitations. The city roared with the passage of huge trucks. Garish lights shone from pawn-shops and second-hand clothiers. Push-carts lined the thoroughfare further to the southward.

Vilos caught a reflection of himself in a glass as he turned and stared at the window behind him. He had not improved in the six months which had ensued since the loss of his fortune. There was a slight rundown appearance to his clothes and shoes and hat. There was a gnawing in his body which was not there before. This desire came from whisky and cheap wines. Beer had only added an occasional green-headache.

The wait for Cragen to come out of the saloon seemed endless. Vilos acted like an amateur sleuth. His hat was drawn down too far. His manner was furtive. He went back to the room and peered over the little door at least three times. Each time he saw the big boss and Cragen deep in earnest conversation.

And because Dugan ruled the ward he had a glass of vichy in front of him, while Cragen's great scar was livid from many gulps of the strongest rye that big men drink.

Cragen was the clue to the Gipsy. Vilos remembered this fact and fortified himself for a long wait. He paced back and forth. He crouched into a hallway. He studied the time as shown by his watch.

It was eleven o'clock when the big boss strode from the saloon, glanced up and down, then started walking rapidly eastward. Vilos watched him disappear.

Cragen came out and lurched along Harnine Street. Vilos became a close shadow behind him. The work was amateurish. Once the man turned and peered backward. He reeled and went on until he came to the broken steps and narrow entrance of a tenement.

He vanished—a deeper shadow within a shadow. A door closed. Vilos crossed the street and leaned against an ash-can. He stared up at the row of poorly-lighted windows.

Then, flittingly, a form emerged from the tenement and glided northward. A feather drooped from a wide hat. It was the Gipsy.

Vilos followed her. He saw her enter the door to the side entrance of the saloon where he had seen Mike Dugan and Cragen talking and drinking.

He opened this door and stepped into the back room. The Gipsy stood by a small slide through which a view of the bar could be seen.

"You?" she exclaimed, wheeling and staring at him. "You here?"

"Yes, it's I," said Vilos, turning down his coat collar and lifting his soft hat. "I've finally found you."

The Gipsy's face blanched. Her hands raised and pressed against her breast. She glanced toward the door.

"I suppose you have people with you?" she asked.

Vilos shook his head and reached for her hand. "Come, let us get a drink!" he suggested. "I want to tell you what has happened to me. I'm down and out, almost."

She eyed him nervously.

"You get a bottle of light port wine," she said, "and we'll sit down. I've got to go in five minutes. Father just came home, and there's a man talking to him now."

Vilos shoved a dollar-bill through the slide and received a quart-bottle wrapped up. He set this on the table, drew up two chairs and motioned for the Gipsy to take a seat.

"What will you have to drink?" he asked as the bartender came in.

"Something soft. A ginger-ale."

Vilos ordered the same. He waited until the bartender had disappeared in the direction of the bar.

"I looked everywhere for you," he said. "I went around to the old address and you were gone. I searched the telephone book and the new directory. Why did you try to break the trail?"

Again she glanced over his form. Her elbows rested upon the table. She narrowed her eyes and smiled with tiny wrinkles forming from the corners of her mouth.

"Why? Because I was afraid you would guess who I was. I saw you talking to Colonel Bishop when I caught that cross-town car. I felt that your uncle had recognized me."

"He did! I told him he was wrong. I wanted to find out for myself, though."

"Are you determined on getting back the money your uncle lost?"

"I've forgotten about it."

She traced a circle with her finger on the table.

"That was well you did," she said, loosening her tan coat and exposing her neck. "You see that kind of money has wings. It's been spent long ago."

"How much did you get out of it?"

The Gipsy traced more circles. "So little," she said, "that it wouldn't have bought a decent gown. You know there are people hired for certain swindling operations, like actors for their parts."

"Gipsy, you're too bright to be a tool. I found out that the sick engineer was Mr. Hickson, and that the one who steered my uncle into the thing was Major Garrick, of the Primrose Club. But finding out won't help matters. I just wanted to see you and get your advice about going to work at something."

She glanced around as the bartender appeared with the two ginger-ales.

"*A voutre santé,*" she said, touching the glass with her lips. "We'll drink a toast. I don't think a woman is bad who steals."

Vilos drank one-half of his ginger-ale.

"That's a queer code," he said. "Who taught you that?"

"Father!"

"Then your father is living by his wits?"

"Yes! He is well known in certain circles. He would kill me if I went wrong, but he taught me to steal."

Vilos saw her glance toward the side door as a woman glided in with a can.

"We've both come down," he said. "I'm living in a theatrical boarding-house, and you're living in—"

"Flannagan's Flats or Tenements! Rent paid by the week in advance. A fence in the basement buys anything you bring to him. It don't make a particle of difference what it is."

"I'd like to move down here," said Vilos.

She glanced at his hands in close-lidded calculation.

"There's nothing to stop you," she said.

"I think I shall. I've been wandering all over this town for the last five or six months. I haven't met anybody who was the least interesting. The more I met the more I thought of you."

"You've been drinking?"

"Yes!"

"Was it on account of losing your fortune?"

"Well, that started me, but I wasn't getting anywhere."

She studied his hands for a second time. She started as the side door banged. Her face was white as she rose.

"I must take back that wine," she said. "I'm awfully afraid of somebody coming in here and finding us together."

"Your father?"

"No!"

"The man who is up with your father now?"

"No! That's a man you know. It's Mr. Hickson, a friend of the major's. I'm too frank, but the man I fear is bigger than any of them. He has threatened to have me arrested unless I'm more friendly to him. He and father are on the outs. Father says that he will kill Mike Dugan if he keeps running after me."

Vilos pushed back his chair. "Why," he said, "your father was with Dugan tonight."

"Yes, I know he was with him. They're always together, but father has a reason for that. Father is queer. Some day you may know him and like him. He thinks the world of me."

"But he lets you act as a confederate in the major's swindles? He lets you live down here in this out-of-the-way place. You should be in a girl's boarding-school."

The Gipsy's eyes widened.

"You're no one to tell me that," she said.

Vilos followed her through the door and out into the side street. They turned the corner together and started walking south along Harmine Street. A clock in a church struck twelve slow strokes.

"Hurry!" she whispered as she thrust her arm through the cover of his elbow and dragged him over the sidewalk. "Father will be furious."

Her back glance as they reached Flannagan's Flats brought out the cords of her neck. Her eyes were haunting.

"Looking for Dugan?" asked Vilos.

"Yes! If he came you would have to get out of the way. He is terrible. He holds father and almost everybody in the hollow of his hand. He knows too much. He is dangerous because he thinks, while other men are drinking."

"I wouldn't get out of his way," said Vilos.

"You?" she exclaimed. "You—well, you don't know him as we do. You don't know him—"

Her voice trailed into a poignant silence. She lifted the bottle of wine and stared at it.

"I'm afraid this is not the right brand," she said, glancing up the street. "I wonder

If I better go back and ask the bartender what kind father usually drinks."

"Let me take it back."

"No! I must hurry! Father and his friend will be wondering where I went. I'm afraid father will come down-stairs and look for me. Good night, Mr. Holbrook. You can call some time when father is not at home. Good night!"

Vilos blocked the way.

"Why can't I come up and meet your father?" he asked. "I know him. He knows me. We were introduced at the Three Students' Ball by Major Garrick."

"I don't think you had better come up. He's busy with a visitor."

"I've met the other man, too. The major and Mr. Hickson were at the club one morning."

Her brow puckered.

"They might think you were after information," she said. "You know you were the one who was robbed—months ago."

"I've given that up, Gipsy. I realize that the money was spent—that it went many ways. Perhaps Dugan got some of it. I just want to talk to you a while. If your father is willing I'll go after another bottle."

She hesitated and held out her hand.

"Promise me that you'll not use any information against me and Mr. Hickson? Promise me that you will forget the part I played as nurse in the Hotel Aldwich?"

"I promise," said Vilos. "I never want to hear of it again. It's done! I just want to sit and talk with you. I want to tell you what I've been doing since I left my flat."

"Come on!" she said.

Vilos followed her through the door and up the flights of gas-lighted staircases whose worn carpets were dangerous to tread upon.

The Gipsy pushed open a door without knocking. She entered and beckoned for Vilos to follow her. He groped within the narrow walls of a hallway and emerged into a room where Cragen was lounging upon a chair. Opposite Cragen sat Hickson—debonair and cool.

"I've met a friend," said the Gipsy. "He's an old friend," she added as she smiled knowingly at her father.

Crägen removed a cord-wrapped pipe from his mouth and rose with a muttered oath. "What t'hell!" he said. "What did you bring him here for?"

"He wanted to see you. I met him on the corner," explained the Gipsy as she removed her coat. "You know Mr. Holbrook, Mr. Hickson."

Hickson bobbed his head. "Hello, old pal!" he said. "No hard feelings, I hope."

"None at all," said Vilos. "I happened to meet the Gipsy, as she said, and asked her to bring me up. Sometimes I find it lonely here in town."

Hickson glanced at Crägen. He swung and studied Vilos from the toes of his half-polished shoes to the prematurely gray hair that lay over his temples.

He shook his head. "You used to be a regular collar-and-necktie boy," he said. "Now I don't know what to think. Are you looking for a little work in our line?"

"What is your line?" asked Vilos.

Both men laughed.

"You know," said Crägen. "You know," he repeated heavily. "Hickson here could use a good man in some little work which is coming off pretty soon. We need a man who has never been shown up and who hasn't been 'mugged.' Are you on Holbrook?"

"I might be arrested," said Vilos.

"You can't be arrested. We're under protection. You get ten per cent and protection."

Vilos turned to the Gipsy.

"Are you in it?" he asked.

"I'll go into it if you do," she said. "I'll teach you everything I know." She motioned toward his fingers. Crägen and Hickson leaned forward.

"A swell bunch of mitts," said Hickson. "Little Nollie Matches had the same kind. He was the fastest pickpocket in the West."

Crägen stroked the scar on his right cheek. His eyes bored through Vilos.

"Comin' in, boy?" he asked.

"In what?"

"A little speculation in pink pearls."

Vilos felt the Gipsy's urging glance.

"I might take a chance," he said.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Man in the Moon

by Homer Eon Flint

CHAPTER I.

LADIES FIRST.

IT is only fair to say, right now, that Catherine accepted Mr. Brett with a distinct condition. She was to be merely a companion to him in his last days. He cheerfully agreed to the arrangement, knowing better than to expect anything more. At the time, he was just four times her age.

"But it's worth it, my dear, just to have you to look at," he often assured her; and he meant it. He made her his sole heir.

So, as might be expected, Catherine soon turned her attention to making use of the million he had left her. She found, of course, that the particular strata of society for which she longed rather frowned down upon her. She had been the millionaire's stenographer previous to their marriage.

Whereupon she deliberately set to work to win a man of her own age; a man already within the charmed circle. She had brains as well as youth and beauty, and she proposed to spare neither.

She went about it very energetically, taking prominent parts in several social-welfare enterprises, thereby coming in contact with the people she sought to know. But she failed to make a hit with the younger men. Had she been as well informed in athletics or politics as she was in business, she would have done infinitely better. And as soon as she realized this, she proceeded to have a good cry, changed her mind entirely, and began to look over the field of confirmed bachelors.

It was about this time that John Bates, of Bates & Foster, Constructing Engineers, decided to run for Governor. Immediately his opponents searched for facts with which to discredit him; and that is the reason why Philip Foster, his partner, was thrust into the public eye and before Catherine Brett's notice.

Philip had been the silent, and incidentally the thinking, partner of the firm, it seemed. His contact with the world had been almost entirely through Bates. Now, people learned that Philip was really the brains of the pair.

Of course, it was the San Francisco-to-Chicago Tunnel which put Bates & Foster on the world map. Before that, they had done everything in the engineering line, from installing the new Pacific Coast wave-motor system to building the Detroit airplane-starter tower. They had nothing to do with such propositions as the San Francisco Bay Bridge; they specialized on difficult work which other concerns were afraid to handle.

That is where Philip Foster's brains came in. Quiet, retiring sort of chap though he was, he had a most astonishing imagination, coupled with a truly remorseless logic. He could devise ways and means where all other experts failed.

Not to go into details; but who except Philip Foster would have had the nerve to adapt the screw-tube principle to so huge a project as the tunnel? Yet, to-day, when folks on the Pacific Coast receive a shipment of freight which left Chicago just

twenty-four hours ago, we may possibly think of Bates & Foster, and that will remind us of Bates; but never of Foster.

The Bates & Foster suite occupied the entire ninth floor of the Ballou Building, on Market Street, not far from the ferry. Altogether, it amounted to nearly thirty rooms, fully a third of which were given over to laboratories; for Philip often had a score of experiments, chemical, electrical or physical, under way at one time. As for the other rooms, most of them were occupied by the small regiment of draftsmen the firm required, while the partners had each a private office, opening off a single reception-room. The knob on Bates's door was worn smooth; Philip's still looked new. The one was opened fifty times to the others once.

Catherine found these details immensely interesting. She learned that Philip could claim membership in the coveted set; and she quickly made up her mind that this hitherto unsought, because unknown, bachelor must be won if she was to prove that she was "qualified."

She did not believe that true love was blind. On the contrary, Catherine was firmly convinced that the only genuine love is that which develops between those who have shown mutual fitness. She believed in love after a year or two of married life, during which both parties had proved that they were worthy. According to her theory, she couldn't possibly have fallen in love with Mr. Brett; it was out of the question for her to prove herself worthy of a man old enough to be her grandfather.

So her apparently cold-blooded designs upon Philip Foster were not so cold-blooded, after all. Catherine fully expected that the affair would become quite ardent enough in due time.

She learned that Philip rarely left his club, appearing in society only when his aunt gave some sort of an affair for a certain orphanage. By means of the most intricate maneuverings, which need not be gone into here, Catherine contrived to attend these affairs, succeeded in getting an introduction, and even managed to hold Philip's attention.

She did it by talking business. It re-

lieved him immensely to get away from the small-talk people; he had never mastered the art of saying much about nothing while seeming to mean it all; and even though Catherine's stock exchange chatter was quite out of his line, it was infinitely preferable to the other kind of embarrassment.

He studied her carelessly. She was between twenty-five and thirty, slightly stoop-shouldered from her early life in Mr. Brett's office, and singularly languid in her movements. This, however, was rather deceptive; in actual fact Catherine Brett covered a great deal of ground in the apparently lackadaisical fashion of hers, whether she were walking or talking. She made every move, every word, count heavily.

Also, she was really beautiful, in a somber, wistful sort of a way. A closer look at her dark brown eyes might have revealed a very slight tightening at the outer ends of the lids. And the deep indentations at the corners of her mouth argued a strength in reserve that one might mistake for secretiveness. Her nose was very slightly arched, thin, and yet not prominent, probably because her chin was straight and sharply pointed. There was a single deep line between her eyes.

Now, Philip Foster was no Adonis. Of medium height and chunkily built, he showed many signs of too much indoor life. His face was pink as a baby's, his hands as soft. In fact, he was dangerously close to being plain, out-and-out fat; and for the past fifteen of his thirty-five years he had assiduously watched the scales, keeping within a five-pound margin which he felt he must never exceed.

His whole manner was exceedingly gentle and diffident. "As modest and bashful as a young girl," the newspapers had said; and Catherine found it quite true.

He had large, blue, timid and unassertive eyes, tucked away beneath a bulging forehead. His nose was really large; likewise his mouth. Why use more delicate terms? The only thing about his face which ever worried him was its lack of a healthy tan. He wasn't bad looking at all, Catherine decided.

Catherine also knew, from the newspapers, that "the other half of Philip Fos-

ter is his office." It was an extraordinarily complete thing, it seems, containing every conceivable publication on every branch of engineering. The man was a human index to all known data about the profession. Principles he knew by heart, while he kept facts and figures at his fingers' ends. In his office he was invincible; away from it—Catherine would see.

They had not met many times before he began to prefer her company. She had the tact not to compliment him in any way upon his success; had she done so, he would have been acutely miserable. And all this explains why, since neither of them cared to dance, they often wandered into his aunt's conservatory.

On the night things began to happen, it was full moon. Philip himself picked out a seat in the most secluded spot in the place. He expected to just sit and listen to her talk, as usual, saying "Yes?" and "Of course" now and then, meanwhile thinking of something really important. He took the place beside her quite without noticing that they had to sit pretty close together in order to fit the seat.

Said Catherine Brett to Philip Foster: "Isn't the moon beautiful to-night?"

CHAPTER II.

AS FOR THE MOON.

PHILIP stirred uncertainly, and cleared his throat. "Very handsome moon, beyond a doubt. Although," he could not help but add, "there's one of Jupiter's moons which I happen to admire a good deal more."

Catherine noted that his eyes were now fixed upon the big yellow disk with which we are all so familiar. Summer time—conservatory—moon; at least three conditions for romance were fulfilled. Catherine lowered her voice:

"What a soft light it is now! Once I saw it from Lick Observatory, and then it had a cold, hard look I didn't like." She shivered almost pitifully.

"It is due to our atmosphere," declared the engineer, thinking only of the softness of the moonlight, not of Catherine's chilli-

ness. "Up at the observatory, the air is much clearer than here."

"Don't you think it has something to do with the warmth of the season?" suggested the woman, softly.

"Only in this sense," he answered, "that there's more dust in the air during the dry months."

She let silence prevail for a little while; then, shyly: "It always makes me feel confidential, somehow, to watch the full moon this way."

He looked at her blankly. "Confidential?"

"Yes"—moving a tiny bit closer to the man. "The moon seems so big and—near! I feel as though I could reach up and whisper secrets in her ear!"

The scientist gave a dry chuckle. "You'd have to reach about a quarter of a million miles, then," said he, adding regretfully: "I haven't the exact figures with me just now."

"But—she looks so big!" protested Catherine, provokingly.

"Very deceiving," said Philip, referring only to the apparent size of the satellite, not to Catherine's manner. "She's less than half the diameter of the earth, so that her actual area is only about one fifth." He added that he would look the matter up the next day, and mail her the data in more precise terms.

She sighed, in a manner which would have opened most men's eyes. "You scientific people are always trying to see the mathematical side of things," she complained, prettily, in a fashion calculated to bring contrition at once. "Isn't there something about the mellowness of that light which—well, which stirs thoughts other than—other than everyday thoughts?"

He longed for a telescope. "Looks normal enough to me," he admitted, sorry he could not see what she saw; he never liked to disagree with people. "As for her light—it isn't hers at all, of course."

Catherine pretended ignorance. "Whose light is it, then?"

"The sun's, reflected," said the scientist. "That's why it doesn't amount to much. Why, it would take half a million such

moons to equal the sunlight. At least, something very close to that figure," he added, uncomfortably.

Catherine sighed again, and Philip realized that he had not said the right thing. He was used to that feeling, however, and simply waited for the next test of his painfully limited conversational powers.

Catherine had a notion to change the subject entirely, then thought better of it. "I wonder why poets often rave about the 'cold beauty of the moon'?" she mused. "There's nothing cold about her appearance now." She settled herself more comfortably in the narrow settee, so that Philip was made freshly aware of her nearness.

"Nor is she cold," he declared. "The moon is always a pretty warm place wherever the sun shines on her. No wonder; her day is fourteen times as long as ours." He reminded Catherine that the moon always kept the same face toward the earth, and added that this peculiarity was due to the great gravitational pull of the bigger globe.

Catherine opened her eyes wide, then closed them swiftly as she saw her chance. "She has nights fourteen days long? What a pity she has no moon!"

"Oh, but she has," returned the agreeable man of science. "The earth is the moon's moon, Mrs. Brett, and a mighty efficient one. Four or five times as big, you know."

"Then," she went on, with studied artlessness, "it would be perfectly grand to sit in a conservatory like this, somewhere on the moon. Just think of a night as long as that, and watching the moon with—with—" She stopped, as though in great embarrassment.

Philip looked at her in perplexity. Not once did it occur to him that anybody could desire his company any longer than half an hour. He thought of something quite different.

"A conservatory like this on the moon?" he chided gently. "My dear Mrs. Brett, there can be no plant life of any kind there. No air or water; besides, the temperature drops down to the absolute zero, during the long night." He was on the point of telling her just how cold the nights became,

but could not trust his memory for the figure.

Once more Catherine let silence have its way for a while, and Philip had just about brought his mind back to the electrical problem he had been trying to solve when she broke in with:

"Just the same, I think the moon has a wonderful influence. I know I simply cannot watch her without feeling—oh, different! "I want to do unconventional things!" she finished daringly.

"Eh?" The engineer's mind collected what she had said. "Oh, I don't see why you should be so affected, Mrs. Brett. This astrological nonsense has no basis in fact. The only influence the moon has upon the earth is in causing our tides."

"Tides?" wondered Catherine, as though shocked. But Philip did not sense the pun. He gave a short and, to him, wofully inaccurate explanation of the tidal action.

This time Catherine did not let so much time elapse. "I wonder why the ancients used to call the moon 'luna'?" she murmured pensively.

"Why, I can't say," he said regretfully. "'Luna'—Latin word, I suppose." He frowned. "Maybe it's from the same root as 'lunatic.' Guess it is."

She clapped her hands lightly. "And yet you say that the moon can have no effect upon us!" she laughed delightedly, tantalizingly. "Although the ancients must have considered that the moon was to blame for everything foolish that happened!"

He pondered this seriously, so seriously that Catherine said, as lightly as she could: "Hasn't the moon ever inspired you to recklessness, Mr. Foster?"

Instantly his face lighted up. "Oh, my, yes! I've had any number of ideas about the moon. For instance—" He stopped, remembering that he was not talking to Bates. But Catherine, taking care not to appear too eager, urged him to go on.

"Well, this is it: Go to the moon and build a large, air-tight hotel. Nothing like this conservatory; more like an office building. Would have to carry all the water from the earth, but that is only a detail. Oh, yes," answering Catherine's questioning look; "there's more than one way to travel

to the moon. Merely a question of controlling the right kind of power.

"Having the hotel, I'd advertise a novelty such as the world couldn't resist. 'Go to the moon and view the full earth.' Ought to make a hit with some of these wealthy time-killers."

He kept right on, forgetting that the woman at his side was herself one of the despised "time-killers." "But the main attraction would be the difference in gravity." He briefly explained how the moon's smaller mass produced only one-sixth the gravitational force of the earth. "Fancy advertising an indoor Derby: 'Come and see Joe Dillon trot a mile in thirty seconds.' Or, 'Watch Annie Kellerman dive five hundred feet into six feet of water.' All quite feasible, you know, Mrs. Brett.

"I'd charge ten thousand dollars for the trip, including forty-eight hours' accommodations, and get rich in a year!"

Catherine had all she could do to resist his enthusiasm. Instead, she commented: "You must be pretty anxious to get rich!"

He became acutely self-conscious. He made some lame reply, and Catherine Brett came to a conclusion which was not at all unwarranted under the circumstances.

As she rose to her feet, she took his arm and gave it a friendly squeeze, glancing up at him in a knowing way which left him badly puzzled. For this is what she was thinking:

"He wants to get rich so that he can match my million!"

CHAPTER III.

WANTED—A MONUMENT.

AMONG the late Mr. Brett's business associates was one who easily outclassed all the rest. He was a tanner, the leader of the Western world in his line, and the practical dictator of the Pacific hide trade. He became enormously rich during the war, through combining with other tanners to secure hides at rock-bottom prices, on the one hand, and selling the product at utterly unreasonable prices on the other.

So it is not really necessary to tell a

name so well known. David Sulzman is not likely to be forgotten in a hurry.

And Catherine thought of him the very next day after, as she thought, she had divined Philip's ambition. She recalled certain things she had heard Mr. Brett say of the aged tanner, and she lost no time.

As a consequence, David Sulzman came to San Francisco one morning, stepping from the San José train just like some commuter. He was entirely without attendants, which was his invariable custom; and most people would have taken him for some highly respectable but not very successful lawyer of the old school.

For David Sulzman, then in his eighties, was not like other men of great wealth. He never even indulged in an automobile, although such a machine would often have been of the greatest service to him. "Can't afford it," he would say, in his low, pleasant, perfectly steady voice.

But this does not mean that David Sulzman was stingy. Whatever he had was of the best; his thirty-dollar shoes were made especially to fit a pair of oddly shaped feet; he wore nothing but the finest of black broadcloth.

Yet his shoes were repaired with the utmost care, as long as they would hold together; his broadcloth was worn until it shone as brightly as his shoes. He did not believe in using anything cheap, but neither did he spend five cents without getting full value. As to his generosity in matters of charity, and other qualities of a more intimate nature, they must be left to others to describe. We are concerned here with the man the world knew.

He did not take a surface-car, much less call a taxi. He walked from choice, preferring to spend several dollars' worth of time in an exercise he valued very highly. This, despite the fact that he required a cane, and could move no faster than a one-year-old child. When he reached the Ballou Building, he was tired out, and glad enough to resort to the elevator.

"Mr. Foster does not see callers except by appointment," he was told, in the engineers' reception-room. "Mr. Bates will doubtless be glad to see you, however."

He did not offer a card; he secretly hoped

he might be recognized. But the people in the outer office were all of a younger set, and none knew the rather striking face of the old man, although his white chin-whiskers, short, stubby, and "Dutchy," ought to have stirred their memories. He shook his head about Bates.

"I know the custom," he said in his peculiarly soft voice. "However, it will be necessary for me to see Mr. Foster. I did not make an appointment, but merely telephoned before I left San José, to make sure that he would be here to-day."

So the old fellow was certain that Foster would see him, mused a stenographer. Then the word "San José" did the rest. "You're David Sulzman!" she said with genuine pleasure. And the old man was satisfied.

As he expected, Philip was willing to see him. The old man faced the younger across a low, clay-filled modeling-table, at which Philip had been working when the millionaire entered. "A relief map of the Mount Lassen reservoir system," explained Philip, "which we have just finished for the Volcanic Steam Power people."

"You seem to specialize on big things," remarked David Sulzman; then, as Philip made no comment: "I have come to the right man."

"The right firm," protested the engineer, with a smile. "Bates is the man you should talk to, really; although I am more than glad to have met you." His eyes went back to the clay.

David Sulzman merely made himself a little more comfortable in his chair. "Mr. Bates may be a very clever man, and no doubt is," said he, with his deliberate gentleness. "But the thing I have in mind requires something more than executive ability. It will take originality of the highest possible order."

Philip waved a hand. "Bates will tackle anything under the sun," he declared. "He tells me what is wanted, and I figure it out." Which was a good deal for Philip to admit to a stranger.

"Then what is the use of talking to Bates first?" the millionaire wanted to know, not a change coming to his voice. "Besides, in one sense this is a rather personal matter."

"I have come to you because Catherine Brett requested me to do so."

Philip Foster forgot all about his modeling. He flushed deeply, sensitive fellow that he was, and David Sulzman judged that he might give Catherine an encouraging word when he next saw her.

"To begin with, Mr. Foster," said the old man, not letting the engineer collect words enough for a protest—"to begin with, I must bother you by explaining my own view-point. Otherwise you cannot be of much help to me."

"You know, of course, that I have a good deal of money. You ought to know, too, that whatever truth there may be in some of these magazine attacks on my business methods, the fact remains that the world has had a great deal more leather, because of what I have done, than it would have had otherwise."

"I understand that," Philip hurried to comment. "No thinking person underestimates men of your stamp, Mr. Sulzman."

But the millionaire was not looking for appreciation. "At the same time," he went on, "I am not blind. I realize that the day of the millionaire is almost past. What with income and other forms of taxation, it is not the game it once was. Moreover," and no socialist could have stated this with more conviction than the aged capitalist, "from now on, Mr. Foster, the world intends to encourage the majority, not the minority."

"Now," he became even more earnest, "many men of my station realize this as fully as I do. They know that the future is to see the rise of the working classes. They know that progress must go on and on, until people will one day positively forbid the accumulation of large fortunes, for fear that the welfare of the majority will be crippled thereby."

"And most of my associates have given in with as good grace as they possessed, and to-day are helping in the education drive, as well as other ways, to help lift up the very class of people which they were trying to keep down only a few years ago. Yes," he said, very surely, as Philip made as though to protest; "it is true. I know—I tried to keep them down myself."

"But to-day it is different. As I say, most of my class have turned to helping the progressive movement, hoping in that way to win the good opinion of the people. A few of us are still bitter about it; you can still read a few reactionary journals, which even go so far as to urge slavery as a solution of the labor problem.

"Personally," said the millionaire, a little sadly, "I cannot look at the matter either way. I am no longer young; I lack the kind of fighting spirit that would be required to stop this new progress. Besides, I cannot bring myself to it; I—"

He stopped, and Philip gathered that it was only the old man's pride that had prevented him from taking part in the great interwelfare movement.

He paused, as though resting, and after a while went on: "And yet, like any other man of ambition, I am anxious to leave behind me a name which will live as long as possible. I cannot depend upon my children to perpetuate my memory; the strain may die out in another generation. Neither can I expect my business to do it; the government will take it over, sooner or later, and change the plant's name into a mere number."

He said this with no bitterness.

"Now, Mr. Foster, other men of wealth have sought to immortalize themselves by building libraries, founding colleges, and so forth. They do not seem to realize that a democracy can do anything it chooses with such things, and if the people ever come to believe that these millionaires did more harm than good, their names will be wiped out overnight."

Philip said: "If all saw this matter as clearly as I do, Mr. Sulzman, you would need have no uneasiness."

"That is precisely what I mean," declared the tanner. "It is because I have so little faith in the good sense of the people that I have come to you."

"I want," his voice rose for the first time, so that Philip clearly saw what a dominating figure David Sulzman must have been when younger—"I want you, Foster, to devise something which will resist stupidity, which will guarantee that I shall not be forgotten, come what may!"

"I want you to do something which cannot be undone, something which will forever remind the world that David Sulzman once lived in it! I give you *carte blanche*; you shall have every cent I own, if need be! The only thing I require of you is that your work shall benefit the people, either directly or indirectly.. Otherwise, the sky is the limit!"

"You mean"—Philip's breath came fast, and his eyes flashed—"you mean, Sulzman, that I am to go as far as I like? To invent anything I choose, build what I think best, so long as it works for the interests of the people in general and at the same time guarantee that they 'shall not forget who did it'?"

As suddenly as it had come, the old man's earnestness disappeared, leaving him a little tired and almost cross. His voice became the same as it had been when he entered.

"You can do anything you damned please, Foster, within the law or outside it, so long as you make the name of Sulzman *live!*"

CHAPTER IV.

STARTING SOMETHING.

PHILIP jumped to his feet and went to his drawing-table, where he leaned over the board and began to kick the legs of the table—his invariable habit when anything especially interesting was on his mind. He had forgotten that the millionaire's call was due to Catherine Brett, forgotten the understanding with Bates. He subconsciously realized that Sulzman's gigantic proposition was over Bates's head, anyhow.

"You're just the man I've been wanting to get in touch with," he said suddenly and with the bashful smile which only came to his face when he felt thoroughly at home with the smile. "Fact is, Sulzman, although Bates and I have pulled off some pretty unusual stunts, we've never been able to take hold of my really big ideas. And I think I've got the one that'll fill your qualifications!"

"Could you make it clear to me now,

or would you rather wait until you have turned the matter over in your mind a while?" The aged millionaire might have been referring to the purchase of a pair of socks, for all the concern he showed. The world will some day be told how David Sulzman once cleared a hundred thousand in ten minutes through his masterful ability to handle large affairs in an unconcerned manner.

But Philip Foster was immensely excited. "I think I could do it right now!"—coming back to his chair, sliding half-down into the seat, stopping in this position for five seconds, and then hopping back to the drawing-table. "That is, in general terms. The details probably wouldn't interest you, anyway."

And within the next quarter-hour Philip Foster had unfolded a scheme which sent David Sulzman out of the office in such a nonchalant, confident, jaunty mood that any one who knew him intimately would have declared: "He's just found out something that pleases him immensely." But those who sat in the train with him never guessed that the old man with the quaint goatee was already anticipating a dream come true, a scheme which would immortalize him, and by so doing influence the life of every man, woman, and child on the earth.

As for Philip, he went at once to his partner. It will be remembered that Bates's campaign was a failure. Probably this tempered his egotism; for instead of disputing Philip's action, he meekly agreed that the hitherto silent partner had best handle the whole thing alone.

Within a week a new organization, known as the Foster Construction Company, was well under way. Arrangements were made for receiving the products of nearly twenty factories, products of a rather curious nature, handled in such a way as to insure very little talk. And mean time superintendents and foremen of exceptional ability were secured by the offer of extraordinary salaries, while a veritable army of skilled laborers was recruited in the same way.

Philip went to see Catherine a few days after David Sulzman's call. He thanked her formally for what she had done.

"You will have to take the credit, or the blame," he said, with his diffident smile, "for whatever we do, Sulzman and I. You've thrown two men together who have the same potential ability for getting results as nitric acid and glycerin!"

She realized that this was quite a speech, for Philip, and more than half suspected that it was rehearsed—which happened to be true. But she said, with just the right amount of shyness:

"I couldn't forget what you told me the other night when we were talking about the moon. About—about your wanting to get rich, you know."

Philip looked up, startled. Ever since Sulzman's advent Philip had given no thought to the other ambition.

"You're wonderfully—" He stammered at a loss whether to say "thoughtful" or "solicitous."

Catherine's face became radiant, and she swayed nearer to him.

"Why shouldn't I be?" she murmured, her eyes fixed on his. Next instant she turned away, as though aghast at her daring; so she never saw the bewilderment on Philip's face. A moment later, greatly to her disappointment, he said he would have to say good-by.

"Going to be an outside man now, for a few months," he told her. His enthusiasm mounted rapidly, and he smiled almost continually as he spoke of the trip he expected to make—an airplane flight to Ecuador, to begin the next morning. "Expect to reach Quito at twelve thirty-five the next afternoon," said he, happily. "Send you some photos."

She held his gaze for a second before remarking very quietly: "Aren't you going to leave one of yourself?"

"Why"—a little flattered—"if you like; I'll put it in the mail as soon as I get back to my quarters." He moved toward the door; then, his laggard memory finally wrenching an item from his unused stock of small talk, he stopped short. "Have you a picture of yourself which I might have?" Unconsciously he made the request seem urgent.

Catherine kept her face averted, for fear it might give her away. She found a small,

semiformal photo which emphasized the appeal in her eyes, rather than the beauty of her face. He took it from her with extravagant thanks.

And it was in just this mood that Philip went to the door. Catherine accompanied him thoughtfully; and as he looked back at her for what he knew would be the last time in several months, there came over him exactly the same feeling he would have known if, after several weeks of helplessness in a hospital, he were told that he would get well.

In his joy and excitement he would feel like hugging the nurse, in whose company he had been fearfully embarrassed before. And to-night he was jubilant, jubilant as a boy on Fourth of July morning; the fact that the "nurse" was a beautiful young woman of great wealth did not alter the case. Just as the man who is usually at ease becomes agitated when a real crisis arises, Philip Foster, ordinarily as shy and awkward as an adolescent girl, became perfectly at ease when the great moment came.

And yet, if Catherine had taken leave of him in a sad or pensive mood, he would not have done it. It was largely because she smiled up brightly at him in her effort to hide her feelings, that his exuberance reached the overflowing point.

"Well—see you in October then!" he exclaimed, as they clasped hands; and then, to her utter amazement, he swept her into his arms and gave her a boisterous kiss!

CHAPTER V.

THE MOON BACKSLIDES.

OF course, Philip was thunderstruck at his presumption, as soon as he had left the house. He wrote a very contrite note to accompany the photo he had promised, adding: "I hope you do not consign this to the ash-barrel because of my folly last night." Then, confident that he had dealt with the case in the most approved manner, he completely forgot about it.

Two days later found him, as he had said to Catherine, descending from the Inter-

continental Aerial Stage landing at Quito. He spent several days in this place, getting in touch with the various factors of his enterprise.

Before he left for the interior, the first shipment of supplies, still in their original cars, arrived via the Pacific Submarine Freight Company's service and the Quito-to-the-Sea Tunnel.

Philip and his associates at once proceeded with the construction of a railroad, using the most up-to-date apparatus in the work and employing a gang to every half-mile; with the result that two months after the first shovelful was scooped, a complete equipment of rolling stock was plying over the three-hundred-mile stretch of line which lay roughly southeast of the capital.

Meanwhile buildings had been put up for men and machines; and by that time Philip was hard at work in Peru, putting the finishing-touches on a huge electric power plant high in the Andes. In all of this, the vast wealth of David Sulzman figured conspicuously, breaking down all governmental interference and securing real cooperation. There were no serious delays.

Philip had been away just five months when a peculiar thing happened, or, rather, began to happen. The general public was the last to notice it; the astronomers were the first, followed closely by the navigators, surveyors and others who had occasion to watch the heavens with any degree of accuracy. It is said that some of the old seafaring men along the water-fronts, watching the tides, noticed it before anybody else; but that is unlikely. What happened is this:

The moon began to slow up. The month began to lengthen. The almanacs all fell into disrepute; for, instead of rising fifty-one minutes later each night, as had been the satellite's average, she now lagged behind this figure until, after a week, her average was over fifty-two minutes!

A small matter, apparently; but to any one who knows how mathematically precise are all the movements of the heavenly bodies, the thing was simply terrific. In every observatory, all other investigations were dropped entirely in order that the whole staff might observe the new phenomenon.

The moon, which for untold ages and with unfailing regularity had circled the earth once every twenty-seven days, was actually slowing down before their eyes!

The public had scarcely done with discussing this mystery before there came an announcement which almost eclipsed the first one. It ran:

"It has been observed, in all parts of the world, that the daily revolution of the earth itself is changing. Instead of twenty-four hours, our day is now twenty-three hours, fifty-nine minutes and fifty-eight seconds long!"

This did not seem possible. Could it be that Mother Earth, who had not been known to vary the thousandth part of a second in the regularity of her spinning, had really begun to speed up a bit in her old days? It took a long time for most people to accept this; until, in fact, a few dependable citizens had had a chance to watch a few dependable clocks. It was true; *the day was shortening.*

But the next thing to attract attention was noticed first of all by a class of people who seldom pay much attention to scientific affairs. The folks here meant usually go by the name of "spooners."

"Honey—how big the moon seems tonight!" was the way the convention had started among these people for ages and ages. Now, it came to have a new meaning. The moon certainly did look big.

"It's due to an optical illusion, deary," was the usual explanation, such as had been given from all time. "If there were no objects on the earth between the moon and you, sweetheart, it wouldn't look so big."

But as night after night passed and the satellite seemed to grow very slightly larger each time, there came a time when everybody on the earth was aware of the new marvel. Shortly there came a third announcement from the authorities, an announcement somewhat delayed as a matter of policy.

"Let no one be alarmed," was this statement; "but the fact is that while the moon's speed has been decreasing, her distance from the earth has also been reduced.

"She is now twenty thousand miles

nearer the earth than she has ever been before. She is falling toward us at the rate of a thousand miles a day!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORLD AWAKES.

THE next three months were the most extraordinary since the deluge. Never before had the world been threatened as it was now threatened. For, unless something happened to stop the moon before she fell the rest of the way to the earth, most certainly the entire globe, together with every living thing upon it, was doomed to absolute annihilation.

"Do not get excited!" the authorities cautioned, again and again, as soon as the announcement had been made. "We will soon discover the cause of this mystery, and then doubtless be able to remedy matters. Keep cool!"

But it did no good. Wherever there was a mind with imagination enough to see what this thing really meant, there also was fear. It was impossible to keep up courage in the face of that ever-nearing satellite, unless one had an especially strong mind. And those whose minds were strong did their best to forget their own fears, by trying to quiet those of others.

The only thing had helped was religion. Everywhere the churches were crowded to the doors; services were held every day, all day long. Vast crowds gathered on the mountain-tops, like the worshipers of old, and madly prayed to God to prevent the disaster. Every soul on earth was searched to its depths by the approaching catastrophe.

Out of all that wild period there emerge two facts which need to be recorded. One is the Second Ark, a tremendous antigravitational machine built by a Syrian named Ben Malik.

"This is the end of the world!" Ben Malik proclaimed, like Noah had done thousands of years before. The Syrian went to prodigious expense to get publicity. "Out of the earth's billions I shall be able to save one hundred. A hundred, no more, may escape the anger of God. Let the devout

assemble and examine themselves, that the fittest of them all may survive, to start life again on some other world!"

People flocked to this call. For weeks the self-examination went on, until nearly half a billion of the less intelligent peoples of the globe had gone through a winning process which left just a thousand—half men and half women—who were adjudged equally competent to represent the human race.

Ben Malik himself was not among them; he was a cripple. And for lack of any better method of picking the final hundred, the Syrian decided to leave it to chance. "The Lottery of the Lord," it was called.

But Ben Malik wanted to make sure. His was one soul in millions; not only was he willing to stay behind in order that a better man might take his place, but he felt constrained to give his Ark a trial trip before the great event took place.

The trial failed. The Ark, a hastily constructed affair, rose to a height of fifty miles and then broke under the strain of its own machinery. It and Ben Malik were totally destroyed.

The other great result of that wonderful period was the political revival. Obviously the swift approach of the moon meant that in a few weeks there would be no such thing as political parties, no such thing as social caste, no such thing as capital and labor. On Friday, the 27th of October, ignorance and wisdom alike were to perish, culture and rudeness were to be no more, poverty and wealth to come to an eternal end!

And it did not take the world long to see this. As always, the people of the thinking middle classes were the first to state the situation.

"Let us forget our differences," was the upshot of what they said. "There is nothing to be gained by contention now; the 27th of October will reduce us to a common level.

"Let us make the remaining days as agreeable as possible."

Of course, there were many who took this as a license. Among this class, the last few weeks were spent in rioting and licentiousness which went past anything the

world had ever known before. No attempt was made to stop these persons; law and order were enforced only when the safety of other people was endangered.

But the great majority of folks saw the thing more seriously. They saw that not one of them could escape the calamity; in those days there was but one known method of getting away from the earth, and that was the method used by Ben Malik, who had scoured the globe to get enough of a certain element to make his single ill-fated attempt.

And so it came about that because it did no good whatever to think of self first, men began to think of others. Only a few weeks till the end of all things! Very well; why not make those few weeks devoid of misery? Why not fill them with happiness, so that when the end should come, it would find men with at least some agreeable memories to take with them.

It was a marvelous thought. Partly, it originated in the churches; partly with the socialists. And before long mankind was gazing upon itself in amazement.

For the earth was transformed. Where before there had been terrible poverty, even in the most enlightened countries, now every effort was made to relieve all suffering. Great hoards of foodstuffs, held for speculation by profiteers, were distributed overnight to the needy. The same with clothing, building materials, fuel and, finally, luxuries. If all was to be destroyed, why not make use of it first?

For the first time in history thrift did not pay. No one could gain by "putting something by." The aim now was to spend, spend for the good and the wholesome, spend for experiences which would leave pleasant memories. Memories! That was what was wanted! Memories which would make the next world worth while!

Couples who had been postponing marriage "until there's money in the bank," got married at once, finding an infinite satisfaction in knowing that the next world would not be a lonesome place.

People of wealth, who formerly had kept aloof from those less fortunate, who had been enjoying their station in life as selfishly as they knew how—such people suddenly

found themselves longing for something more substantial than memories of extravagance. Instead—

They began to find rare pleasure in helping those who needed help. They became eager in their efforts to give happiness. Shortly men and women of vast wealth turned their magnificent homes over to those who, because of misfortune and weakness, had known nothing better than tene-ments.

And a time came when people who had previously thought nothing of keeping half a hundred people from useful industry in order that their mansions might be "properly served"—a time came when these millionaires fought hysterically among themselves for the privilege of service, for the chance to make some one happy for a few hours.

And another class of people who, before, had gone about their work in a sullen spirit, convinced that their employers were robbers, were amazed to find a wonderful satisfaction in working as they had never worked before. They took vast pride in careful workmanship, got vast satisfaction from a consciousness of service rendered well. The end should find them on the job!

Memories! Memories of work well done, of something accomplished for the welfare of others. Memories of the blissful look that came to the face of one who had been presented with a right long withheld. Above all, the knowledge of having done something at last to right the fearful injustice of the world!

CHAPTER VII.

MADE IN AMERICA.

PHILIP FOSTER had been away about eight months when, quite unexpectedly, he returned. He brought with him certain Intercontinental officials whose names need not enter this account, officials who had been invited to the plant in Ecuador. Philip did not go home at all; he merely sent Catherine an aerogram, and proceeded straight to Washington.

On the same day, and for the first time, newspapermen were permitted on the

grounds of the Foster Construction Company's plant. They found that the word "grounds" scarcely did the place justice; "tract" would have been more accurate; for there were about fifty square miles of the wildest mountain territory, all carefully guarded by several companies of aerial and ground patrols.

These reporters immediately transmitted their negatives by the Pacific Wireless Photography Service to the League of Nations Daily Screen News, who distributed the films to all parts of the earth by plane; so that Philip's little speech was flashed before the public in several million talking-picture theaters, at the same time the reporters' material was released.

"Friends and fellow citizens of the earth," began the engineer, using the English language, at that time the nearest approach to a universal tongue, "in behalf of my associate, David Sulzman, I wish to explain the thing that has worried us so long, and then get your judgment as to our future course of action.

"As I need not tell you, the moon, which has been dropping toward the earth for the past three months, came to a halt night before last, and has since showed no motion whatever. We seem to be in no danger now of that collision.

"At the same time"—and here a photo of the moon took the speaker's place on the screen, while his voice went on—"at the same time, the moon has entirely ceased her former monthly trips around the earth. And our day has been decreased to something like twenty-two hours.

"Now, be patient with me, but I've got to remind you that the moon, when she finally did come to a stop, did so on the side of the earth opposite from the sun. That is to say, we now see the moon each and every night; she rises when the sun goes down, and does not set till the sun rises again eleven hours later."

Philip need not have apologized; people never grew tired of hearing this incredible fact put into words. He hurried on:

"As a result, the whole world now enjoys full moon every night. Only, compared to what we used to call full moon, she's a supermoon now."

"To-night the moon is only a tenth as far away as she used to be." And the screen showed a small landscape of a part of the earth, with the satellite in the background. A hundred times the size she had been three months before, the moon was now an enormous, shining globe of tremendous brilliance and beauty, seemingly near enough to be touched with the fingers. She occupied a space larger than the bowl of the Great Dipper.

"If it were not for the fear she has aroused," continued the man of science, "we'd appreciate her more. The moon now lights our nights for us as they've never been lit before. We don't need artificial lights now, except for very special purposes; our country roads are as bright as our streets ever were; our streets brighter than any café.

"At the same time the moon has caused our tides to become immensely higher, and our ocean waves much greater. This has compelled some of our seacoast towns to rebuild extensively. On the other hand, it has enormously increased the output of our wave-motor system, so that we are now able to dispense with wood, coal, and petroleum entirely. In short, the moon has made us a present of enough power to turn every wheel in existence; and for all practical purposes, she has abolished night."

He made only brief mention of the great religious and social revivals, and their consequences. Not that Philip Foster was out of sympathy; instead, he was tremendously glad to see justice brought about as it had been. He was before the people merely as an engineer, and as an engineer he talked on.

Then came the sensation. The films which had been sent from Ecuador were shown. And for the first time the world learned what the secrecy-shrouded enterprise had been.

The most important of the great group of buildings which comprised the company's plant was a giant, dome-shaped structure, exactly like an observatory on a mammoth scale. Within it, and visible through an open slot, stood a colossal telescope. That is, it appeared to be a telescope, until its nature was revealed.

"This," it was explained, "is a device for projecting large quantities of radioactive elements to a distance. It is operated by means of electrical current taken from a hydraulic plant in Peru, and is capable of exerting terrific force."

As this was said, the "telescope" was slowly brought to the horizontal, and trained upon a range of peaks several miles away. The scene was next shifted to this range.

"A small amount of power will now be released," went on the explanation. "Watch closely the rocks on the top of the nearest peak." This was about a quarter of a mile away.

Next moment a wonderful thing occurred. A very large boulder, apparently of granite and weighing many hundreds of tons, was slowly toppled over by some invisible force; so that in a moment it was rolling and tumbling, end over end, down the side of the peak.

"The power-plant is located opposite the camera." As this was said more boulders were dislodged and sent flying down-hill, until the air was thick with rock-dust. There was a slight wait till this had settled; then came the finishing touch.

"Watch the entire peak this time."

At first nothing could be seen. Nothing appeared to be happening. Then, very slowly indeed, a change occurred in the outline of the mountain. Another moment, and one could see that its upper half was shifting. Before two minutes were up, the entire top of the peak had moved out of place among its fellows, so that it finally stood with one edge overhanging a deep chasm.

And then, while millions of people gasped in amazement, that whole vast mass of granite was tipped up, up and over, until it toppled inertly into what had been the cañon. At the same time there was a sharp earthquake, which was noted by seismographs in all part of the globe.

Then came a quick "flash" back to the ray-projector, where a streak of blinding white light, about two hundred yards long, was now being emitted from its orifice. As the picture came to an end, the light began to subside very slowly.

The voice and figure of Philip Foster came back to the screen. "I suppose you've guessed it now," said he, with a return of his diffident smile. "The Foster Construction Company is responsible for the moon's backslding!

"Every day for the past several months, when the moon had passed the meridian, we have been playing these rays upon her western, or left-hand, edge. You will understand that the left edge of the moon is her 'front,' with respect to her motion in space. Well, for six hours daily that 'telescope' has been pushing with all its might!

"That's why the moon has come to a stop, and why the earth has come to revolve faster. By turning on this power very gradually each day, and, turning it off just as slowly when the moon had set, we've been able to use Ecuador as a fulcrum without the knowledge of any one else on the earth."

It was not until then that the supreme audacity of the thing seemed to dawn upon the scientist. His face changed, and a certain amount of determination came into it as he finished.

"Ever since the moon fell to its present distance of twenty-four thousand miles, the projector has been trained upon the center of her disk, instead of upon her western edge. In this way the moon has been prevented from falling any nearer—the whole matter has been calculated with extreme care, of course—and so long as our supply of certain chemicals holds out, we can keep the moon just where she is. I may add that we have a duplicate equipment to guard against accident.

"Now, the future is up to you, people. The company can keep the moon in its present position for a year. Or, it can proceed to undo what has been done, and restore the moon to exactly its former position and speed. In either case, the world's entire supply of the necessary materials will be used up in the process."

He waited a moment before going on. In the mean time, the feelings of those who were watching and listening, can best be imagined. What a choice he was offering!

"However," he continued, now smiling broadly, "there is a third alternative. It is this:

"That suitable sky-cars, already completed and thoroughly tried out, be sent with men and materials at once to the moon's surface. And once there, this equipment would proceed to make the moon's present position *permanent*.

"It would be done by means of miniature projectors, using— However, these details are a little intricate. You will find them discussed in a pamphlet the company is issuing. You may take my word for it that the method will succeed.

"So there you are. Either we (1) keep the moon on the job as a curiosity for about a year, and then let the smash come, or (2), we push her back where she used to be right away, or (3), make a real job of it, and keep her where she is as long as she'll stay!

"Take your choice! I thank you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN—

CATHERINE had had plenty of time to think it over. Philip's lack of response to her letters bore out her suspicions, first aroused by his note apologizing for having kissed her. By the time Catherine had recovered from the astonishment of Philip's announcement to the world, she had resolved to match boldness with boldness. She would demonstrate her worthiness by being as audacious, in her own sphere, as he had been in the realm of science.

Once more the considerate reader must remember her theory of love and marriage; she was confident that ardor would come out of such a rationally made union. And she made her plans in all sincerity, sure that nothing but good would come from it all.

When Philip reached California he proceeded to call at once upon all whom he felt he should see. He made out a list in his methodical way, mapping his route so as to make every minute count. His one idea was to get it over, so that his time might afterward be occupied with something more valuable than social obligations.

He had figured that eight minutes, pos-

sibly seven and a half, would elapse between leaving and reentering his plane at the Brett home. As he ran up the steps he was already estimating the amount of time probably necessary for the next call. In each case he had taken pains to make sure that the person he wished to see would be at home at that particular hour.

But he suspected nothing whatever when, as he was announced at the Brett drawing-room, he found the place already nearly filled with callers. He never did know that an impromptu tea had been hastily arranged. He only wondered that Catherine should have so many callers so early in the afternoon.

He stood, embarrassed as usual, looking over the people before him. There was a small knot of women in the further corner. The butler spoke his name; and with remarkable speed the knot untangled, revealing Catherine herself at the center of the snarl.

She gazed at the returned hero as though she were entranced. She stood there for exactly the right length of time to get everybody's attention; then, her face changed, she gave an enraptured gasp, and in half a second had crossed that room, as it seemed, on wings.

Just in front of Philip she paused, for the briefest possible instant, peering at him as though to make sure her eyes were not deceiving her. Then she gave a tiny, happy, hysterical laugh, and swayed suddenly toward him. He involuntarily thrust out his arms; the fixed smile was still on his face.

And then her arms were about his neck, and his about her shoulders. The scientist had no time, no warning, no chance.

"Phil, my dear!" cried Catherine Brett.

Of course, it is all old news now, but it's a bona fide part of this account and therefore must be mentioned. By this is meant the remarkable end of the whole Foster-Sulzman scheme.

In one way or another the people of the world managed to express their choice of the three alternatives Philip had named. In the more advanced countries the thing was done by direct vote of the citizens them-

selves. In others, where the majority were not capable of forming an opinion, it was done for them by their representatives, whether political or ecclesiastical.

And when it is remembered that the moon's previous position and motions had had a very definite influence upon religious history in some lands, it is really remarkable that there was not more opposition than did develop. However, even the Brahmins finally came to see that the masses would be greatly benefited by the electrical power which the moon's new location would insure. Practically the whole world agreed to making the "new moon," as it was called, a permanent institution.

Consequently Philip and his associates, after remaining in the United States about two weeks, returned to their plant with the League of Nations itself backing their work. However, those two weeks were extremely significant ones.

Philip was daily in Catherine's company. He had, of course, felt obliged to go through with the thing according to Catherine's lead. His disposition would not allow anything else.

She had explained her theory; he had been unwilling to argue about it. And one day he found himself asking her to fix the day, quite without knowing that she had manipulated the conversation so as to make him do it.

They were to be married as soon as he came back from the moon. This was settled a week before he started. And during that last week the scientist looked at the matter just as cold-bloodedly as Catherine had looked at it some time before.

He saw that Catherine Brett was as unlike himself as any one could possibly be. At first he argued that "opposites attract"; then he began to look for some one point on which they could agree, a sort of home base, to which they could fly in case of differences.

There didn't seem to be any. Neither he nor Catherine was in love with any one thing. Even in love of country they differed; for while Catherine was an orthodox American, Philip was an internationalist, as might be expected in a man of his type of mind.

As for simple, elemental, animal attraction—even Catherine was obliged to admit that as yet she didn't care for Philip's embraces more than, say, her brother's. She may have been right in insisting that all this would come in time; but Philip continued to look for "something to hitch to." And he couldn't find it.

On the other hand, he found plenty of real obstacles; Catherine liked poodles; he, Philip, loved children. Also he was passionately addicted to trap-shooting, and very apt to get up at two o'clock in the morning, during the winter, in order to slay ducks. And for this kind of insanity Catherine had an absolute horror; she had had a relative hurt in a hunting accident, and she would certainly worry every minute.

In petty matters—which often loom prettily large—there were more objections. Philip was inclined to be stout, and liked to have the house warmed to precisely sixty-eight degrees or lower. Catherine, being slender, required a temperature about six degrees higher. Moreover—don't laugh; this is deadly serious—Philip was a great lover of the photoplay, which Catherine simply could not tolerate.

Of course they respected one another. Philip stood in awe of Catherine's social prestige and business acumen, while she fairly worshiped his profession. But Philip did not agree that Catherine, in throwing herself into his arms, had thereby matched his own boldness.

"What you did was old, old stuff," he might have told her had he been conceited enough, which he wasn't. "What I did was absolutely new."

But Philip never realized what a terrific effort it cost Catherine to make her actions appear natural on that occasion. Only a woman could appreciate that supreme play.

And only a man could comprehend to the full the mental and moral agony the man went through before he finally began the moon's transfer.

So neither understood the other. And the great difference between them can best be stated by simply remarking this: that, whereas, Catherine was not aware that she did not fully appreciate Philip's feat, yet he plainly saw that he could never properly

value hers. It was the old, old distinction between the mind that has ceased to expand, and the mind that is ever expanding.

CHAPTER IX.

—IN THE MOON.

IT was done. Nearly half the moon was gone—the half the world had never seen, and now was never to see. It was blown into space by the steady pressure of what are now known as "Foster's rays." At times the cloud of powdered rock-dust was clearly visible from the earth as the material was ejected from the surface.

It is only necessary here to add that the insignificant gravitation of the moon was not enough to pull any of this dust back to the surface. It was hurtled into the void, never to return.

In this way, just as Philip had outlined, the mass of the moon was decreased to the exact point where the sun's pull, added to that of the earth, amounted to just enough to keep the moon in place. As we look up at the immense disk above us to-night—always there, night after night, turning what once was blackness into continuous twilight—as we look up at her, we take it for granted that she will always look just like that; that she will forever continue to circle the sun, instead of the earth. The younger generation will find it hard to believe that she was once a pitifully small object, giving only a hundredth part of the light she now gives.

Of course she is only half a moon now, as a result of what Philip and his associates accomplished. But the half that is left is the half which people have always seen.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that miniature projectors were used to propel the heat-and-cold-proof sky-cars through space. Buoyed up on those irresistible rays of invisible force, the vast loads of men, machines, and materials necessary for the work were transported quite without difficulty. In fact, up to the very last day the whole enterprise was carried off without any loss of life, and with only a few trifling accidents. That made the last day's record even more of a shock to the world.

For, upon the return of the last sky-car to the earth, people were startled beyond measure to learn that Philip Foster himself had lost his life just as the work was being completed.

"He left the sky-car, dressed as usual in a protective, insulated suit, taking enough oxygen to last over an hour." So ran the official report of the superintendent, who immediately wired a copy to Catherine. "He said he intended to take pictures of a near-by crater before its destruction.

"No one saw fit to watch his actions. He was out of sight for perhaps half an hour; then some one saw him on the edge of the crater taking photos. He again disappeared. It was thought that he was returning to the sky-car as he knew that the crater was next in line for the projecting crew.

"But just as the men were sweeping the rays in that direction three men in the sky-car plainly saw Mr. Foster standing motionless half-way down the inner slope of the crater, out of sight of the workers. There was no mistaking his suit; it was different from the others. And before the three men could warn the crew, the crater was wiped off the moon.

"Mr. Foster probably did not suffer, for the reason that the shock of the rays would certainly have caused concussion of the brain. A thorough search of the locality was made as soon as the rays were stopped, but quite without results. At this moment the unfortunate man's remains are now flying through space in the direction of the constellation Hercules."

And yet, before the last of the sky-cars had put a thousand miles between itself and the moon, a strange sight would have met the eyes of any person who might have been left behind. There were no telescopes aboard the car which would have shown the thing. Neither was any one on the lookout.

Directly beneath the sky-car, on the patch of the moon's surface which the machine had just quit, there was a stir and a movement in the soil. Presently a large, square section of the sun-lit material was in actual motion; and before the eyes of the mythical beholder, a cavern was revealed in the solid rock of the satellite.

A minute passed, and then a figure clad

in a suit the exact duplicate of the one the three observers had seen destroyed, clambered lightly to the surface, and turned the big glass eyes of its helmet up toward the fast-disappearing sky-car. It was the figure of a man of medium height, inclined to be stout, who slouched somewhat even as he sat on the edge of the pit.

No one needs to be told that it was Philip Foster. And a glance into the cavern would have told the whole story. The place was stocked with enough supplies of all sorts, very scientifically selected, to last one man a lifetime.

Presently the engineer disappeared, to return with the framework of a small, hemispherical building, which he at once proceeded to set up over his cavern. When finished, some time later, it provided him with a neat, little, combined observatory, drawing-room, wireless-station and living-room, all incased in glass.

To-day an unusually fine and powerful wireless tower stands in the mountains of California; and under the direction of John Bates, sworn to secrecy, the news of the world is daily transmitted into space. On the moon, a former fellow citizen hears what earth's billions are doing.

All about him is desolate wilderness. The sun shines continually just above the eastern horizon; there is neither day nor night. Always the dark side of the earth is toward him; he sees very little of the globe he renounced. He never talks to a living soul, although he makes a great many talking-machine records; why, we need not try to tell.

But he has a great deal to be thankful for. He has plenty to eat and to drink; the air he breathes is chemically pure; he always has the great black above him, every star shining with vast greater brilliance than we on earth ever know. And beside him at all times is his beloved library, the condensed compendium of all the information that is worth while to him.

And back in Bates's office, in his safe, is a sealed document which is to be opened only in a certain contingency. In the vaults of a well-known bank rests a large chest, in which, among other things, is a duplicate of this document.

And—mark this—so far as any one on earth knows, there are not enough of the required chemicals in existence to produce the "Foster rays" once more. The moon will never be visited again!

As we enjoy our satellite this evening, if we happen to possess extra keen eyes we can detect a short, dark streak across the face of our moon; a streak which no astronomer ever saw in the old days. And if we use a small opera-glass, we can see just what it is.

For the Foster Construction Company made a thorough job of the moon's transformation. All the while that the crews were blasting on the other side, another

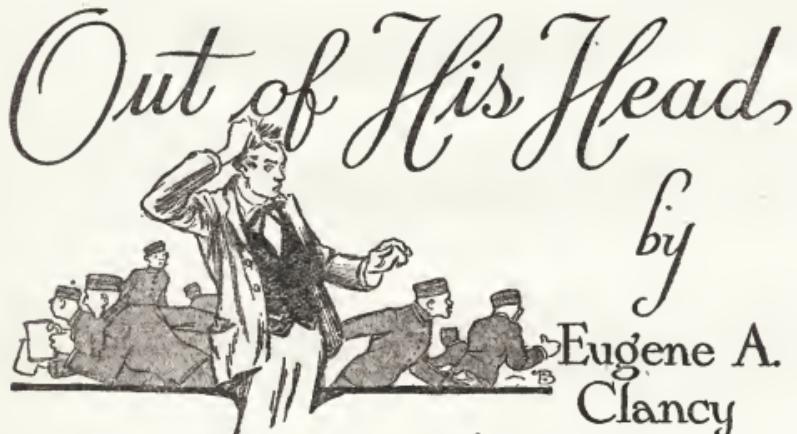
crew of chemists was at work on the earthward face. Look closely through that glass, and this it what you will read:

GIFT OF DAVID SULZMAN.

But, although many of us will utter the old guess about "the man in the moon," and many will recall the supposedly tragic fate of the Californian engineer, only a very, very few will know that there is now an actual, bona-fide, flesh-and-blood being on its surface. That an American citizen now lives there, its sole inhabitant, and the only genuinely independent man in all creation.

For he, of all men, is absolutely safe from the other sex!

(The end.)



GEORGE PLUMMER was the day clerk of the Towaco House. George was also the night clerk. The boss fixed it that way himself, without consulting George about it. The boss figured that with afternoon naps up-stairs and uninterrupted dozing while at the desk, George could accomplish continuous clerking without injuring his health or efficiency and with much comfort to the boss's bank-roll. The boss was right.

There never was much doing at the Towaco House, anyway. You see, Towaco is a no-man's-land somewhere on the Erie. Only traveling men stopped off there, and they didn't stop to sell goods. They stopped

for a rest before going on or back. Stopping at Towaco was just a bad habit.

George Plummer napped and dozed for six months; then one afternoon something happened. A splendid touring-car thundered up to the Towaco House, and a big, forceful-looking, middle-aged man jumped out and strode into the size-two lobby. A glance showed that he was not a traveling man; in fact, he had all the atmosphere of being somebody—the big boss of great enterprise.

George snatched his undersized body from the chair, ruffled his mop of tow hair, and stood blinking at the big man with his peculiar blue-green eyes.

"Do you want a room, sir?" he asked.

"Do I look as if I did?" the big man came back, with a broad grin. "I want some lunch, young man. Ham and eggs, pie and coffee—quick! This shack looked like regular ham and eggs, so I stopped. Got to bust into the sky-line again in half an hour. Get a move on—stagger!"

George staggered.

The big man was very red in the face. It was evident that, despite the dryness of the country, he had found some hard stuff somewhere. He insisted that George come into the dining-room with him and sit opposite while he punished the ham and eggs.

As many men will under such circumstances, he talked at great length. He used George as a kind of peg on which to hang his loquacity, and without any particular reason he told George all about himself. It seemed that the big man really was some peanuts in this world, and was taking a motor trip through unexplored parts of the country to rest his mind.

"I judge that you are a self-made man, sir," George ventured to remark.

"Self-made and hand-made!" replied the ham-and-egger, as he rose and lit a fifty-cent cigar. "Sure! You bet! Thirty years ago I hit New York without the price of a shave—and now look at me, kid! I had an idea, and I took a gamble with myself. Any man can do the same. Look at Napoleon, Lincoln, J. Caesar! All did the same! That's the dope, kid. It's up to you! You got a damn funny face, but you'll get over it! *Au reseevar!*"

George Plummer stood on the porch and watched the car until it disappeared; then he went and sat behind the desk. But he no longer dozed. For some reason, George was now very wide awake. What was that the big man had said and hinted at? Was it possible that George Plummer and Opportunity could have a date? After supper that evening he asked the boss to hold down the desk while he went out for a while.

George went straight to the Towaco Public Library—open evenings, and presided over by Myrtle Wild. Yes, that was her very own name; and Myrtle wasn't at all wild. She was a nice little scout with

only one bad habit—she wore her hair according to the movies, and as the style changed with every picture her pretty brown hair had a rather tired look from being mussed up and rearranged so often. Besides this bad habit, she had a failing—she seemed to like George Plummer.

Myrtle was the only girl in Towaco who considered George as a possibility. All of which George was totally unaware. George was the kind of male person who is dreadfully formal, polite, and impersonal with girls.

"Good evening, Miss Wild," said George. "I have here a small list of books which I should like to obtain."

Myrtle gave him the double-up-and-down-and-back again. She sighed. There was no gleam of special admiration in his eyes. The effect of the latest style was quite lost on him. She looked at the list. It contained these items:—"The Life of Napoleon," "The Life of Lincoln," "The Story of a Self-Made Man," "How to Succeed."

"Why, George Plummer!" Myrtle exclaimed. "You sure have laid out some reading for yourself—and never been in here before! Well, we have them all." "Say, why don't you come to some of our parties?"

"I'll be delighted to, some time, Miss Wild," replied George. "But I'm very busy just now. I'll take those books and run along."

Thus it happened that for the following six weeks the boss found George with his nose eternally buried in a book.

"He's got the book bug—gone on a regular lit'ry jag!" said the boss to the traveling men. "Seems to have some idea, but won't loosen up about it."

George Napoleoned during the morning, Lincolned in the afternoon, self-maded and succeeded in the evening. At last he came up for air, and one evening took the books back to Myrtle.

But the next morning Mr. Plummer developed a new phase of himself. He indulged in deep thought. The boss found him wandering all over the place in a trancelike condition. Then, a few days later, he took to writing, hour after hour.

"I've got it!" said the boss to the traveling men. "He's writin' a book—the story of his life! Guess he wanted to see how them other guys did it."

George continued to write each evening in his small office back of the desk. He tore up a lot, and rewrote, but hour after hour he wrote on, in his round, careful penmanship. At last he seemed satisfied with what he had written, and one day he packed the dozen or so sheets of mysterious dope into a large envelope and mailed it. A week passed, and another, during which time George presided over the desk with the abstracted air of a man who waits on great events.

Monday morning a letter addressed to Mr. George Plummer arrived from New York. It was brief:

DEAR MR. PLUMMER:

We have been greatly impressed by your remarkable letter. We shall be glad to see you if you can come to New York.

Very truly yours,

BENDER & WARREN.

George read this note with a calm, serious expression. For just a moment there was a gleam of triumph in his blue-green eyes, but that was all. He sought the boss.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "I am sorry to leave you, but I have been called to New York. I shall take the noon train."

The boss stared at his clerk.

"What the h—" Then he paused, as if a sudden light of understanding had come to him. Much to George's surprise, he shook hands with him effusively.

"So you made a go of it, eh? And none of us ever suspected that we had one of 'em right here in Towaco. Regular lit'ry guy, eh? Well, George, I'm sorry to lose you, but maybe a whirl in them lit'ry high spots will do you good!"

Then the boss rushed off to confide in a traveling man.

"George did it!" he said. "Some publisher guy in New York has bought his life. Wow!"

"Where do you get that junk?" asked the traveling man disgustedly. "You're no fool, Thompson. What's the real answer?"

But the boss turned away without re-

plying and went up to his own room. There, behind closed doors, he spread out on the table numerous torn and discarded sheets of foolscap, which at various times he had abstracted from George Plummer's waste-basket.

What George had written in his round, careful hand seemed to cause his boss much unholy joy.

"Some document!" he remarked. "The League of Nations ain't got anything on this!"

II.

ABOUT seven o'clock the following evening a serious-faced, slightly undersized young man wearing a free-and-easy suit, a soft hat of no particular shape, and carrying a shiny new suit-case, walked into the lobby of the big Hotel Mammoth, on Broadway, Manhattan. Being used to all sorts of things, the Mammoth did not shudder or grab for an ammonia sundae. Beyond giving him an oh-look-at-it smile, the Mammoth plainly was not interested in him and showed no wild desire to welcome him. Even the bell-boys failed to plunge forward and take his bag. They strove to please, but there were limits. Besides, the young man's appearance did *not* suggest large tips.

"A hick from Hickville!" said one youth, nudging a companion.

"Get onto them pants!" said another. "Seagoing—an' ain't been pressed since never!"

Meanwhile, the hick from Hickville, without any sign of being flustered, pushed his way through the crowded lobby to the desk.

A polite but cynical-eyed clerk felt compelled to notice him.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he inquired.

"A room and bath—not too expensive," said the hick.

"Didn't you put in a reservation?" the clerk asked in such a tone that he might as well have said right out: "You certainly are a hick!"

"No; I didn't think it would be necessary here," said George, quite unaware that he wore a Hickville label.

The clerk considered him for a moment.

"Well," he said finally, "I can let you have a small room. Five dollars a day." He swung the register around and offered George a pen.

"Haven't you anything cheaper than that?" George asked.

"Our cheaper rooms are all full. Let me suggest, sir, that you try some smaller hotel."

"I'll take that five-dollar room," said George as he meekly signed the register.

One of the boys now felt constrained to pick up the shiny bag and escort its owner into the elevator—hurriedly. George was shot to the top floor. In the room he handed the boy a dime.

The youth stood and stared at him.

"Isn't it enough?" George asked.

"Well," said the boy, "I could use a quarter—if you could spare it, boss."

George removed the dime and replaced it with the desired quarter. As soon as the boy was gone George sat down on the bed and took out a note-book and pencil. He made a note of the dime-quarter transaction; also a note of the fact that he should have made a reservation.

Fifteen minutes later the hick from Hickville stepped out of the elevator into the lobby. He still wore the free-and-easy suit, but was minus the hat. He wore no vest, but displayed a pink shirt, a soft collar, and a black string tie. He stood for a moment, rumpling his tow hair, his blue-green eyes roving the lobby with an oddly intense, purposeful light in them. Half the lobby bumped into him, and a girl waiting to keep a date with her reporter friend tried to vamp him, just to see what would happen. But being bumped and vamped evidently went over George's head.

He strolled up to the desk and spoke to an assistant clerk.

"Are all those people occupying the lounges and chairs registered here?" he asked.

The clerk, accustomed to all kinds of cock-eyed questions, sighed deeply.

"I really don't know, sir," he answered feelingly, "but I'll have them all paged and find out, if you like."

"Thank you, but never mind," said

George, taking out his note-book and jotting a jot.

"What's the big idea?" asked the amazed clerk.

But George had strolled on.

A rattle of jazz from the far corner drew him. He had a hunch that the violent music came from the dining-room, and he was hungry. He made for the entrance; then found himself halted by a red-plush cord stretched across the doorway. Several men and women were standing there, awaiting admittance.

On the other side stood the captain with his hands behind his back, calmly inspecting the group—and mentally figuring how much each would cough up.

George waited two or three minutes, as if to see whether anything was likely to happen. As nothing did happen, quietly he unhooked one end of the cord and was about to ease himself in.

Then something did happen. The captain pounced on George, while lesser captains hovered close. The captain gently but firmly pushed George through the ropes and back where he belonged.

"Perhaps you have a reservation, sir?" he remarked in a tone which plainly asked: "Can such things be?"

"No," said George; "but I should like to have dinner right away. I'm stopping here, you know."

The captain's eyes said: "Is it possible?" But he unbent slightly and said aloud: "Let me suggest that you try the gentleman's grill down-stairs."

"Thank you—I guess I will," said George meekly—but out popped the note-book again and, right under the captain's puzzled nose, George jotted himself half a dozen lines.

He went down to the grill. Here he found no cord. The grill captain just hid him away in a far corner without any delay, and kindly began to compose a dinner for him.

But, George, suddenly inspired by a memory, stopped him.

"Look here!" he said. "Ham and eggs, pie and coffee—quick! Get a move on—stagger!"

The waiter, a red-eyed Jugo-Checko,

gasped. For a moment it looked as if he were going to bust George Plummer in the eye; but he regained control, and with many long, hot speeches to himself, went for the Towaco feed.

When it was all over in the grill, George strolled up to the lobby again and approached the cigar-counter, where he bought a pack of cigarettes.

"But this brand doesn't cost this much, miss," he said to the girl who drew trade there.

She eyed him pityingly, but condescended to explain.

"You're paying hotel prices—five cents more on everything. Say, ain't you never been in a hotel before?"

"Certainly," George answered. "I've worked in one."

"Mills?" asked the girl.

"No," replied George, "I have never worked in a mill—I said I have worked in a hotel—"

"Oh, wait—let me get my handkerchief! I gotter cry—I gotter—oh, Gawd!"

George stared at her solemnly. Then out came the little old note-book! Having jotted, he turned away, while the girl looked after him in pop-eyed wonder.

Strange to say, in spite of the fact that they continued to treat him as the original hick from Hickville, George stayed on at the Mammoth for a week. He never went out, but was a species of indoor pest—he and his jot-book. The bell-boys made bets as to where George would next appear—in the cellar, on the roof, or standing star-eyed in the lobby.

However, on the morning of the eighth day of his stay, George showed an unexpected but welcome intention of at last taking the air. He telephoned; then actually he went out. Half an hour later George Plummer presented himself in the offices of the law firm of Bender & Warren.

III.

GEORGE was ushered into a private office and found himself facing a tall, lean man of about sixty-five—a man with worried eyes, nervous, scattered hair, and a twitching gray mustache. Jim Bender, famous

in the Yale Club and elsewhere as "Ball-'Em-Out Bender," glared at George, and motioned to a chair opposite the big desk.

"Sit down, Mr. Plummer, sit down!" he said. Then, after another glare, Jim Bender leaned back in his chair, snatched a handkerchief from a pocket, and furiously mopped his brow as he muttered: "I thought as much!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bender?" remarked George politely.

"I said it is a rotten hot day!" said Bender, his mustache twitching.

"It certainly is a little warm, Mr.—"

"And I say it's rotten hot!" roared Bender, clutching the handkerchief very much as if he wished it was somebody's neck.

"Now, Mr. Plummer, listen to me: In the first place, I want you—and everybody else, for that matter—to understand distinctly that I am only an agent in this business. You are here according to the positive orders of my client, orders which those who know him know better than to question. He is Johnny Archman—maybe you have heard of him or read of some of his doings in the newspapers?"

George suddenly sat up; his chest swelled.

"You—you mean John J. Archman, the millionaire?" he gasped.

"I do!" Jim Bender snapped, again mopping his brow. "Johnny Archman, known as the eccentric millionaire—blast him! He leaves all his affairs in our hands. And if it wasn't for the fact that we need his account here, and that I have an affection for the old hound, I'd like nothing better than never to hear of him again! Well, recently Johnny got the controlling interest in the Mammoth—and unloads the direction of the place on me! I know nothing of hotels—and Archman knows less. But what does the old fool do but suddenly pulls one of his wild stunts, gets aboard and rides it full tilt! And when Archman gets going like that, no one can stop him or talk to him until he's had his fling, no matter what it costs him."

Bender paused to mop and glare; then he roared on:

"Some idiot gave Johnny a book about efficiency ideas, new-fangled business no-

tions, and such things. He went crazy over it, and, without ever having been in the place, suddenly decided that his new toy, the Mammoth, was horribly mismanaged and could be made twice as profitable as it is.

"He rushed in here one morning and ordered me to find a new man to take charge of it for a month—a man with new ideas, and not a New Yorker. Told me to scour the country. Well, young man, it happened that very morning your letter was lying on my desk. I gave it to Archman. He read it through—then he slammed his fist on it, jumped up, and yelled: 'Here's the man—the very man we want! Get him—put him in charge at once!'"

George swelled some more. He made a sweeping gesture and rumpled his hair. He breathed hard.

"Then, I suppose, Mr. Bender," he said solemnly, "that you—you will arrange an appointment for me with Mr. Archman?"

"I would like to—I most certainly would like to!" replied Jim Bender, again clutching the handkerchief. "But I can't. The day after he read your letter Johnny sailed for South America."

George's face fell. "Then, I am to understand—"

"You are to understand that, according to my client's orders, I am putting you in charge of the Mammoth for a month!" It was an explosion, rather than a statement. He jabbed at a button, and a stenographer came in. He dictated a memorandum. "There!" he said, tossing it to George. "That's your authority. I'll write to Mr. Marshall, the manager, to-day."

George clutched the memorandum.

The stenographer, deftly concealing her thoughts, went out.

"Now, how about salary?" Bender asked.

George considered.

"Well," he said, "I—I think I shall ask for—for fifty dollars a week—until I make good."

Bender choked.

"All right," he said finally. "I think Mr. Archman would approve of that."

Suddenly he opened a drawer and took out the document that had been mailed

in Towaco. He glanced through it. The first page was a letter to the management. The second page was headed: "How a Big Hotel Should be Conducted; New Ideas in Management."

Bender put down the screed and gazed at George.

"Where did you get this dope, Mr. Plummer?" he asked.

"I worked it out myself," said George modestly. "I—er—I devoted a lot of study to my theories, and have every confidence in them. I might add, Mr. Bender, that I have spent the past week at the Mammoth—observing. I have here a little book of notes which I should like to read to you."

"Let's have it," said Bender.

Out came the jot-book. It was pretty full by this time. George read his notes and comments. He read for a few minutes, then paused as if for encouragement.

Jim Bender was looking at him with something like awe in his worried eyes.

"Remarkable insight, Mr. Plummer," he said as he rose and held out his hand. "I see you are already on the job. Well, go to it and do your damnedest!"

There was real feeling and pathos in his voice as he shook George's hand and conducted him to the door.

IV.

REACHING the street, George Plummer did something that never in his life had he done before. He hailed a taxi. Jumping in, he instructed that he be driven to the Hotel Mammoth with all possible speed. The driver seemed to have his doubts, but, remarking to himself that you never can tell from the looks of a man, he whirled George up-town at a good clip. Reaching the hotel and flinging the man a dollar and ten cents, George hurried through the lobby and up to the balcony floor, where he stepped briskly into the private office of Tom Marshall, the manager.

But here his briskness blew up for the time being—the manager had gone out on business, and no one knew when he would be back. George frowned; then retired to

his room, requesting to be informed the moment Mr. Marshall returned.

In reality Marshall had gone to the races, but his secretary did not consider that it was any of George Plummer's business.

Tom had had a bad day at the track. The last race was his meat, according to the dope. He put ten yellow ones on an alleged horse. But it was not a horse. The animal, whatever it was, looked like a horse, and made a pretense of running like a horse, but the result was too pathetic even for cuss-words. Tom felt so sad that he stayed out on Long Island for supper, and did not get back to the Mammoth until after eight in the evening.

He was in a bad humor. Entering his office, he was startled and annoyed to find sitting there a tow-headed, hicklike person whom he recalled having seen around the hotel recently. Before he could speak the hicklike person rose and addressed him briskly, meanwhile offering him a folded paper.

"Good evening, Mr. Marshall," said George. "I've been waiting for you all afternoon. I must ask you to kindly read this memorandum."

Wondering what sort of crank stunt he was up against, Tom took the paper and read. Slowly, like a man in a trance, he put the paper down on the desk and stared at George. Then suddenly his eyes fell on a letter lying on his desk. He snatched it up, tore it open, and read:

DEAR TOM:

The thing has happened, as you probably know by now. The man Plummer has arrived, and we've got to go through with it—you know Archman! So this is merely to confirm. By order of John J. Archman, George Plummer is to have charge of the Mammoth for a month. You will continue as manager, but you are to put in force, recommendations, or suggestions that he makes. I feel for you, Tom. May Heaven protect you!

BENDER.

Tom Marshall reached for a cigarette, lit it, and sank weakly into his desk-chair. His fine, handsome face was a study; it was hard to say whether he wanted to swear or laugh, or do both. In a moment, however, his expression cleared. He stood up and offered George his hand.

"Well, Mr. Plummer," he said, "this is rather a surprise! I don't suppose that you will want to—to start anything to-night?"

"No," replied George with evident reluctance. "But if you will be kind enough to order a desk put in here for me first thing in the morning, we can have a conference then. Good night, Mr. Marshall." And George strode from the office briskly—with a step of dignified authority and a smile to assure Mr. Marshall that all would be well in Denmark.

And, sure enough, early the next morning the Plummer régime went into effect in the Hotel Mammoth. As the morning hours wore on, the news penetrated to all parts of the hotel that the mussy little pest, the awful hick from Hickville, was some kind of special investigator and supervisor extraordinary—even Tom Marshall had to take orders from him!

In the "conference" George outlined his ideas and gave Marshall some instructions. Tom said nothing. He was very pale, but his pulse was good and he was able to sit up and smoke a cigarette. Then George summoned various employees of the hotel. His first interview was with Armand, the chef.

The result was startling. Armand, indignant at the summons, walked straight from the kitchen, wearing his white cap and twirling his mustache. He listened to George for a while; then suddenly Armand flung up his arms wildly and laid down a terrible barrage of vivid French and his own English.

"*Jambon, Jambon!* Haash! I shall not! Non! It is insult—madness himself! My temperament is bust—I go! Pig that you are!"

And that's just what Armand did—he went at once. Waving his arms and talking to himself, he rushed from the office, down through the amazed lobby, and, clad as he was, jumped into a taxi, and ordered the astonished driver, who knew him, to take him to his apartment at once—where he announced his intention of staying until such time as the Mammoth came to its senses.

George appointed a deputy chef and continued his interviewing. The chief clerk

received the shock of his life and went out reeling and jibbering. All single rooms were to be at a uniform price of three dollars; all suites four; and no rooms whatever reserved in advance.

The *maitre d'hôtel* got his. No tables in the dining-room to be reserved; first come, first served! It happened that the hat-checking privilege had expired, and was up for renewal. George abolished the institution.

The housekeeper— But about that time Tom Marshall grabbed his hat and went to the races.

George spent the rest of the day going about giving personal instructions to bell-hops, chambermaids, taxi-starters, waiters, and the girl at the cigar-counter. Somehow the Hotel Mammoth survived that day and night.

The next morning it found its new boss's ideas crystallized in a large electric sign over the desk.

It flashed this to the world:

This is YOUR hotel. Just sign the book and let us take care of you. No ROOMS or TABLES reserved in advance. Uniform, reasonable rates for everything.

WELCOME!

Added to this, the clerks received a bundle of printed cards which they were to hand each person who registered and distribute to those already in the hotel. The cards read:

DEAR GUEST:

If you are not comfortable, if you are not receiving proper service, apply to me personally.

GEORGE PLUMMER, Boniface.

Before the luncheon hour, men appeared with movable hatracks which they placed beside the center-tables in the dining-room. They screwed small racks over the side tables along the walls. Then, instead of the usual elaborate Mammoth *menu*, small cards announcing "simple, wholesome dishes," were placed on each table.

Having accomplished all the above, and put in force numerous other innovations yet to bear fruit, George placed his hands in the pockets of his free-and-easy suit and

strode with an air of authority and possessiveness up and down the lobby, occasionally rumpling his mop of tow hair, his blue-green orbs roving about to spot slackers to the new regime.

The luncheon crowd never being very large at the Mammoth, there was only desultory trouble during the afternoon. But as the dinner hour approached, the Mammoth began to exhibit all the signs of earthquakes, revolutions, and declarations of war. People who had wired innocently for rooms were arriving in shoals. They gnashed their teeth and swore. Some took the rooms offered them; others promptly shook the Mammoth dust from their feet.

One gentleman from the West, however, demanded an explanation. "What's come over this outfit?" he roared. "You got my wire, didn't you?"

Politely the clerk pointed to the electric sign, at the same time handing the irate one a card.

"What the hell do I care for your fool signs!" the gentleman yelled. "And what are you giving me this for—here, show me this Boniface guy!"

George stepped forward. "The clerk is correct, sir," he said. "We are under a new management. We do not reserve rooms, but I can show you the best in the house—"

The gentleman exploded again. "So you're this Plummer guy, eh? Plummer! It ought to be spelled with a B! Say, I've been stopping here for years—before you or any one like you was born! But I'm through—I'm damned if I stay in any hotel run by a plumber! Boy, take my bag out to the cab!" And shaking his fist in George's face, the gentleman went.

About this time guests began telephoning for the Boniface. A nervous lady from Vermont, on the ninth floor, said she smelled smoke, and would Mr. Plummer investigate at once. George promised to do so. A pair of sports on the sixth floor wanted to know if Mr. Plummer would like to join them in a little stud game in their room. George thanked them, but said he was too busy just then. There were half a dozen other calls for Mr. Plummer, three of which necessitated his taking

the elevator and answering in person. By the time he stepped into the lobby again there was a slight perspiration on George's brow, but hastily he wiped it off and resumed his Boniface smile.

He walked toward the dining-room, where the red-plush cord was no more. There was quite a mussy scrimmage going on at the entrance. Patrons who had tried to reserve tables were milling back and forth, fighting each other and swearing at the helpless captain, who was doing the best he could, considering the obvious fact that he could do nothing.

At the sight the perspiration came out on George's brow again, but again he wiped it off. He seemed about to say something, but instead he trotted around the edge of the mob and slid himself into the dining-room. It was pretty well filled, but, strange to say, a lot of people seemed to be going out hastily, after a glance at the new menu card and words with the waiters. Wearing his Boniface smile, George strolled up to a young man and girl in evening dress at a side table. "I trust you are quite comfortable, sir," he said.

The young man looked up in amazement. "And who are you?" he asked.

George proffered one of his cards. The girl giggled. Before the young man could speak, a waiter hurried up to George. "The gentleman at my table wants to see you at once, Mr. Plummer," he said.

Giving the young couple a parting smile, George turned and followed the waiter to a center table where a large man was seated with three elaborately gowned women. The large man was excitedly waving the menu. "Look here!" he exclaimed to George. "Where is your regular card—do you mean to tell me that all we can get is this camp junk? And why can't these ladies check their wraps—what's the meaning of this clothes-line here?"

George bowed and smiled. "We are now serving plain, wholesome—"

"Well, I'll be *damned!*" roared the large man. "I didn't believe it—the Mammoth turned into a lunch-counter! Come on—let's get out!" And out they went, while George stood there, a puzzled, slightly worried look on his face.

At that precise moment, and unknown to George, a reporter was in a Mammoth telephone booth, speaking rapidly to a city editor down on Park Row. The city editor clutched the phone, a gleam in his eye. "Great stuff!" he yelled. "Go to it—two columns! Front page! Get his picture—we'll run it with Archman's! Get it!" Other reporters were doing the same, and other city editors were yelling, "Great stuff!"

Thus it happened that when George, again wearing his Boniface smile, strolled back to the lobby, immediately he was surrounded by half a dozen eager young men with pads and pencils. "We want your story for the papers, Mr. Plummer," said their spokesman. "Tell us about yourself and your remarkable plans for the Mammoth!"

George smiled. He swelled and ruffled his hair. He smiled as would Napoleon or Caesar. He had arrived! Carefully and with easy modesty he told them about himself and answered their questions, while the pencils of the serious-faced young men flew. Then they photographed him.

A dozen or so calls for Mr. Plummer had accumulated while the interview was going on, but now George did not feel equal to answering them. He felt a little exhausted. Leaving instructions to say that he was busy, he went up to the office. He had a great desire to see Tom Marshall. But Tom had not returned. In fact, he had telephoned in to say that he had been called out of town for a few days.

Tom's secretary dumped a mountain of miscellaneous papers in front of George. He looked at them a few minutes, and again the perspiration stood out on his brow. "Please take care of these," he said, getting to his feet. "I—I'm going to get a bite to eat." He went down to the grill, consumed a pair of chops and some coffee—and then George went right up to his room and to bed.

However, he was up very early. The first thing George did was to get all the newspapers. Yes, there was his picture, together with that of John J. Archman. But as he read the stories he frowned. It seemed to him that they were just a bit too

flippant—but the papers, he reflected, were always taking liberties with prominent people.

That was a red-letter day in the history of the Hotel Mammoth! A riot in a madhouse might describe it. Having read the morning papers, it looked as if all New York had managed to take an hour off to come in and see for itself personally. George was kept rushing all over the hotel. It seemed to him that the whole world was doing nothing but call for Mr. Plummer! Mr. Plummer! Mr. Plummer! He was the busiest Boniface on record. By noon he ceased to wipe his brow—he just let the perspiration trickle down into his eyes—eyes that were beginning to have a wild glare in them.

At two o'clock he went up-stairs for a nap. It was after eight when he awoke. He felt better now, and phoned down to ask if everything was all right.

"Sure!" answered Tom's secretary. "Going fine! But I hope you will come down at once, Mr. Plummer—we need you."

George shaved himself, straightened his string tie, and went down. Immediately he was summoned to the desk. A delegation of fifty business men from the South who had wired for rooms were telling the world what they thought of things. When they found out who George was they fell on him *en masse*. They passed him around among themselves. When that was over, and George was gasping for breath, the telephone calls for the Boniface began again, only now the whole hotel seemed calling him at once, much as if the thing had been planned. Wildly George rushed up and down and around.

Then, on one of his flying trips through the lobby, a bellhop carrying a large pitcher suddenly stepped out and confronted George. "Mr. Plummer," said the boy, "Colonel Daingerfield, up in 1022, wants his iced tea."

"Well," said George, mopping his brow, "why don't you take it to him?"

"I thought you knew about it, sir," the boy replied. "You see, the colonel is our oldest guest. As a special favor, Mr. Marshall always takes the colonel's iced tea up

himself, and as Mr. Marshall ain't here, maybe you'd better do it, sir." And seizing the psychological moment, suddenly the youth thrust the pitcher into George's hands.

George stood there clutching the pitcher. "I see," he said, a little thickly. "Of course—I'll take it myself." Holding the thing tight, George entered an elevator and was whizzed up to the tenth floor.

He knocked at the door of No. 1022. Receiving no answer, he knocked again. There was the sound of some one getting out of bed and swearing. Then the door flew open and a tall, gray-haired man with a ferocious mustache and clad in pajamas stood there, glaring. "What the devil!" he exclaimed. Yes, the colonel was from Kentucky, sir!

George smiled his Boniface smile. "I've brought your iced tea, colonel," he said genially.

"You've brought *what?*" demanded the colonel, actually turning pale. "Look here, young man, are you trying to get funny with me? What the devil do you mean?"

"In the absence of Mr. Marshall," said George, "I brought this—"

Suddenly the colonel snatched the pitcher and held it up to his nose. "By the old Harry," he yelled, "it *is* tea! Well, see how *you* like it!" And instantly the colonel raised the pitcher, poured the contents over George's head, and flung the pitcher itself into the hall. Then the colonel slammed the door and went back to bed.

In stepping back, George tripped and fell sprawling. The tenth-floor telephone girl came to his rescue. "Oh, Mr. Plummer," she said as she helped him up, "you're wanted down-stairs at once!"

George swayed a moment, wiping the tea from his face. The wild glare in his eyes was now very pronounced. He tottered into an elevator. Reaching the lobby, he found himself in the midst of a howling mob. Crowds were surging around, demanding that some one point out to them Mr. George Plummer.

The house detective hurried up to George. "Mr. Plummer," he said, "this crowd is beyond our control—I've just

phoned for the police reserves! You better go up-stairs or we'll never get this bunch out!"

George tottered back into the elevator. "Up—up to—to my room!" he stuttered. Reaching the top floor, he swayed and tottered to his room and flung himself on his back on the bed. Queer noises came from George's throat, and there was that wild glare in his eyes.

It chanced that the housekeeper, a motherly soul, was on the top floor at the moment. She saw George enter his room. She hurried to the door and looked in. "The poor man!" she murmured. She sat on the side of the bed and put a hand on George's fevered brow. "It's been too much for you, Mr. Plummer," she said. "Just lie here and take a rest."

Somehow the touch of that motherly hand brought George a sudden vision. He saw the peaceful old desk of the Towaco House; he saw his old, suspender-clad boss genially dozing in the little back office. Towaco—peace and quiet!

And suddenly, to the astonishment of the housekeeper, George jumped from the bed. With feverish haste he flung his belongings into the shiny suit-case and snapped it shut.

"Why, Mr. Plummer!" the housekeeper exclaimed. "What—"

"I'm going away from here!" George yelled. "Now—forever!"

Grabbing up the suit-case, he rushed from the room and flung himself into an elevator. As he sprang into the lobby, the police were busy clearing out the mob, and there was the clang of fire engines outside, for, in the general excitement, some one had called out the fire department!

But George heeded not. Like a man with one overpowering purpose in life, he plunged through the battle, hatless, clutching the shiny suit-case. Out on the street he jumped into a taxi. "Hudson Tube—quick!" he yelled. Meanwhile Tom Marshall's secretary was telephoning the Yale Club. "It's all right, Tom," he said. "George has beat it!"

George rushed into the Erie Station, only to find that it was too late for a train to Towaco. Trainmen looked him over in

wonderment—George was the wildest specimen ever seen in the station. "What's the matter, kid," one of them asked; "somebody dead? Say, the Western flier is just leaving—she stops at Junction City, an' you can get a local from there in the morning!"

George grabbed a ticket for the flier. The train was actually moving when they let him through the gate. He dropped the shiny suit-case on the platform and hurled himself aboard. The suit-case bumped and fell under the flying wheels—and was no more.

He sat bolt upright in the smoker; he seemed to be urging the flier to still greater speed.

"Clean bugs," said the conductor to himself as he took George's ticket.

George did not sleep; and when he got off at Junction City he sat glassy-eyed on a bench for two hours waiting for the Towaco local.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when a disheveled, glassy-eyed, tow-headed and hatless figure presented itself in the quiet lobby of the Towaco House. The boss gave a startled look; then he came forward chuckling and shook George's hand. "Well, well!" he exclaimed. "If it ain't George Plummer! Why, you're the most famous man in Towaco, George! We read all about it in the papers. Just dropped in to look us over, eh?"

"I—I would like my job back, Mr. Thompson," said George, his eyes roving to the comfortable chair behind the little desk.

The boss chuckled. "Surest thing you know, George!" he said. "Your job is right here waiting for you—but I think you'd better get something to eat and go right to bed just now, George. Myrtle Wild has been sorter helpin' me out while you—while you were showin' 'em a few in New York."

Just then Myrtle herself—with it done in the very newest style—appeared from the back office. "Why, George, you poor dear!" she exclaimed. "You come right into the dining-room and I'll rustle you something to eat at once."

And meekly, totteringly, George obeyed.

Ashes to Ashes

by Isabel Ostrander

Author of "Twenty-Six Clues," "Suspense," "Between Heaven and Earth," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

NORMAN STORM, moving in good society and holding a position in a large trust company, but almost at the end of his financial resources, saw his wife, Leila, in the business section of the city one afternoon, but she did not see him. Yet, at dinner that night in their suburban home in Greenlea, with Storm's closest friend, George Holworthy, she told them that she had not been in town "for ages." Later Storm heard her talking over the telephone to some one she called "dear," and later she went out. The next day chance remark made Storm think that his wife was involved in an affair with Dick Brewster, a neighbor who was estranged from his wife; and when he returned home that night, earlier than he was expected, and found Brewster kissing Leila's hand and thanking her for "the happiest hour of his life," he was sure of her guilt. As matter of fact, Brewster was thanking Leila for her efforts in bringing his wife and him together again.

Neither Leila nor Brewster knew that Storm was in the house, and after Brewster had left, Storm went into the den where Leila was sitting, and accused her of unfaithfulness. There was a stormy scene, during which Storm struck Leila with a golf club. The blow killed her.

He felt no grief nor remorse—she had deceived him! Storm destroyed every evidence of the crime, arranged the body as if she had fallen and struck her head against the fender in front of the fireplace, and went to his room. Next morning the body was found by a servant and Storm called. Acting the part of a grief-stricken husband, Storm sent for Dr. Carr, who, in turn, sent for the county medical authorities. Storm also sent for Holworthy, who arrived in deep sorrow at the death of Leila.

After an examination that brought out the fact that Leila had been subject to fainting spells, the authorities decided that she had died by accident. No suspicion had attached to Storm—he had won!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LETTER.

DESPITE his sense of victory the day was a long-drawn-out period of torture for Storm.

Upon the departure of Dr. Carr and the officials, George Holworthy had to be told in detail the story of the night's tragic event, and its reiteration drew heavily upon the store of self-control which was left to his companion after the ordeal through which he had passed, but Storm narrated it carefully, with a critical consciousness of every effect.

"I don't know what is the matter with me!" he cried dramatically in conclusion. "I can't break down, I can't seem to feel, George! I saw her as she lay there, I tell myself that this ghastly, unbelievable thing is true and yet it has no meaning for me! I catch myself listening for her step, waiting to hear her voice! Am I going mad?"

"It's the shock," George said quietly. "The stark horror of the thing has stunned you, Norman. You can't feel it yet. You are numb, I suppose."

He looked curiously shrunken and withered and years older as he sat hunched there in his chair, his faded, red-rimmed eyes

blinking fast. Storm felt a sense of impatience, almost of repugnance as he regarded him. His evident sorrow was a subtle reproach before which the other writhed. Could he endure his presence in the days which must decently elapse before the funeral? George would be useful, however, in the interim, and when it was all over he could shut himself away from every one.

"That's why I sent for you," he observed. "I can't seem to get a grip on things, and I thought you would take charge for me and keep off the mob of sympathizers—"

"I will. I'll attend to everything, old man. There's bound to be a certain amount of publicity, you know, but I'll see the reporters myself, and fend off the neighbors. Carr will send in the undertaker and I'll phone Foulkes. Is there any one else you want me to notify?"

George did indeed prove invaluable, for Millard had spread the tidings and soon the house was besieged by horror-stricken friends of the dead woman. They came from all walks of life, from the humblest country-folk about, to the most arrogant of the aristocratic colony, in mute testimony to the breadth of her kindness and the affection she had inspired. From earliest afternoon, too, reporters began filtering in on every train, but George held them off with surprising tact and diplomacy, and by nightfall a semblance of peace had fallen upon the bereft household.

The den was restored to its normal state, the door locked, and in the dainty drawing-room across the hall from the library, Leila lay as if asleep, her golden hair falling low to hide the cruel wound, and all about her the early spring flowers she had loved.

Now that they were alone together, George's presence proved insufferable, and Storm, professing complete nervous exhaustion, suggested that they retire early.

George, worn out with his own emotions and the strain of the day, acquiesced in evident relief. He had dreaded a night-long vigil with his bereaved friend and rejoiced that the strange, seemingly dazed apathy which had held him in its grip was giving way to the demands of overtaxed nature.

Sleep, however, was furthest from Storm's intentions. There was work still to be done, and in secret. Foulkes had signified his intention of coming out on the first train in the morning and it was possible that he might suggest going over Leila's papers. If that letter which she had tried to conceal the day before were found, or any other correspondence from Brewster, it might precipitate the rise of a suspicion which otherwise seemed now to be eliminated.

Leila's desk was down in the library, and waiting only until he felt assured that the occupant of the guest chamber across the hall had fallen asleep, Storm put on soft felt slippers, drew his dressing gown about him, and descended.

How still the house was! Still, yet vibrant with something unseen but palpitating as though the spirit had not wholly departed from that immobile form lying amid the blossoms, whose fragrance stole out with cloying, sinister sweetness upon the air.

Storm closed the library door noiselessly behind him, switched on the light and crossing to the little desk stood transfixed.

A book lay upon it and from between its leaves protruded, as if carelessly or hastily thrust there, what appeared to be the very letter he sought. "Leicester Building." The engraved letters stood out as he drew the envelope forth, but above them was a line which made him start.

"National Tool and Implement Company."

But Brewster was an insurance broker! The name had an oddly familiar ring, too. What could it mean?

With shaking fingers he drew the enclosure from the envelope and read:

Mrs. NORMAN STORM.

DEAR MADAM: I have reconsidered my decision of this morning, and am willing to sell to you the strip of land adjoining your property at the price you named, on condition that the deal be consummated with you personally. I will enter into no negotiations with your husband. If you will call at my office to-morrow, the ninth inst., with your check, I will have the deed and bill of sale ready.

Your obedient servant,

ALPHAEUS JAFFRAY.

Storm crushed the letter in his hands. The trout-stream! Leila had bearded their

irascible neighbor in his town office and induced him to sell her the property which he himself had been unable to force or cajole the old scoundrel to relinquish!

But why had she been so secretive about it? Why had she lied about her presence in town, sought to conceal the letter, striven to make a mystery where no cause for one existed?

The queries which hammered at his brain were swiftly swept aside by the one dominating fact. Her visit had not concerned Brewster, her lie had concealed no act of guilt or even indiscretion! What if—Great God! If he had made a hideous mistake?

But no! He had seen them together, she and her lover, in that very room not twenty-four hours before; had heard Brewster's impassioned words, witnessed his act of devotion! Whatever motive had prompted her secret purchase of the trout-stream, it was beside the point at issue. There must be proof in her desk, proof to augment and support the evidence of his own eyes.

He tore the drawers open one after another, scattering the neat piles of correspondence. Social notes, cards of invitation, receipted bills, memoranda, and household accounts—his feverish fingers sought in vain among them for a single line of an intimate or sentimental nature. But then, Leila would scarcely have kept secret love letters in an open desk. Somewhere in her apartments up-stairs, perhaps, she had arranged a hiding place for them.

Then a swift remembrance came to him. The secret compartment! Back of the small drawer between the pigeonholes on the desk top was a small space to which access could be had only by pressing a hidden knob. Leila had found it by accident one day and been almost childishly delighted with her discovery.

Storm removed the drawer, pressed the spring and the false back slid aside revealing two packets of letters. One was bound by a bit of white satin ribbon, yellowing now and slightly frayed; the other encircled merely with a rubber band.

The sight of them brought a grimace of triumph to Storm's lips, but it changed quickly as he tore the ribbon from the first packet. The letters were all postmarked

prior to ten years ago and were in his handwriting—his own love letters, written during the period of their engagement and before. One end of the ribbon was knotted about a dried flower; an orange blossom! It must have been from her wedding bouquet.

A strange tightness constricted his throat and he thrust the packet hastily aside. He did not want to be reminded at this hour of the happiness, the fool's paradise in which he had lived before enlightenment came. No sentimentality must be permitted to weaken his self-control now.

But the second packet, too, contained only his letters; those written since their marriage, mere notes of a most prosaic sort, some of them, sent to her during his infrequent absences from home and reminding her of trivial, every-day matters which required attention. The last, dated only a month before, concerned the reinstatement of MacWhirter, their antebellum gardener. Why had Leila kept every scrap of his handwriting as though she treasured it, as though it were precious to her?

For a long time he sat there staring at the scattered envelopes, the first vague, terrible stirring of doubt which had come when he read Jaffray's letter returning again to torture his spirit. Then once more the scene of the previous night in that room arose in reassuring condemnation, and with a smothered oath he seized the letters and tore them viciously, the older packet with the rest, until nothing remained but a heap of infinitesimal scraps and the bit of yellowed ribbon.

He wanted them out of his sight, destroyed utterly, but where—The fire in the kitchen range would have been banked for the night, but he could rake the coals aside. Sweeping the torn letters into a newspaper together with the ribbon he made his way quietly to the kitchen.

The range balked him at first and he strove vainly to coax a blaze from the livid coals, but with the aid of kindling wood and after much manipulation of the dampers he succeeded in producing a tiny, wavering fork of flame. Upon this he thrust handfuls of the paper scraps, and when they caught and blazed up he thrust the ribbon deep among them.

How slowly they burned! The edges of the ribbon charred and it curled up, writhing like a living thing in agony. The flame was dying down and Storm had turned frantically to the wood-box to pile on more fuel when suddenly there came a grayish puff, a leaping tongue of fire and the ribbon vanished, leaving only a heap of pale flakes against the darker, coarser ashes.

Storm scattered them and was placing an extra stick of wood upon the glowing coals to make sure that the evidences of his work would be wholly obliterated when the utterance of his name in surprised accents made him wheel as though a blow had been dealt to him from behind.

CHAPTER XIV.

HIS BIRTHDAY.

NORMAN! I thought you were in bed!" George, his short, obese figure, grotesque in an ugly striped bathrobe, stood blinking in the doorway. "What on earth are you doing down here? And what's burning? There's a funny odor—"

"Wretched green wood. No wonder the cook grumbles about this range; I thought I should never get it going!" Storm interrupted hastily. "I couldn't sleep, and wanted a cup of coffee. There was no use in disturbing the servants."

"Why didn't you call me?" demanded the other. "I could have made it for you. You look all done up, Norman. Did you take that sleeping stuff Carr left for you?"

Storm shook his head.

"It would take more than that to bring sleep to me to-night," he said.

"Well, anyway, I don't know what you are poking about in here for!" objected George. "You're a chump to try to get the range going at this hour when you've got that electric percolator in the dining-room. Here's the coffee; come on in there and I'll have it ready for you in no time!"

Storm followed him in silence, only too glad to get him away from the kitchen and watched him as in deit bachelor-fashion, he manipulated the percolator.

Storm drank the coffee when it was made

and then dragged George off to the library where the latter at length fell asleep upon the couch, but Storm sat huddled in his chair, dry-eyed and brooding, until the dawn.

Wendle Foulkes appeared at nine o'clock, his keen old face very solemn, and almost his first words, when his condolences were made, set at rest a question which Daly had raised on the previous day.

"You know, of course, that Leila left no will," he began. "At least, none to my knowledge, and I am certain she would have consulted me had she entertained any thought of making one. Death was farthest from her imagining, poor child! What she left is yours, of course, but we will have to comply with the law and advertise for heirs."

Storm made a gesture of wearied impatience and the attorney went on:

"There is something I must tell you, Norman. You were not my first visitor on Monday morning. Leila had been before you; she left only a few minutes before your arrival, but she had requested me to say nothing to you of her coming."

"But, why?" Storm stared.

"She came to consult me about a piece of property which she wanted to buy; that strip of land next your place here, over which you and Alpheus Jaffray have haggled and fought for years. She had got in the old man's good graces somehow, and she believed that she could persuade him to sell it to her even though he was so violently antagonistic to you. I don't mind telling you frankly that I advised against it, Norman. It would have taken all that she had left of her original capital and I knew how yours was dwindling, but she won me over."

He paused and wiped his eyeglasses, clearing his throat suspiciously meanwhile. "She ordered me to keep the proposed transaction a secret from you and I promised, but now it is only right that you should know. She left to go to Jaffray's office, over in the Leicester Building."

George Holworthy, who was hovering in the background drew in his breath sharply, but Storm repeated with dogged insistence.

"Why should my wife have wanted to

keep such a secret from me? I cannot understand it! She told me everything—" He paused involuntarily, biting his lip. There was one other thing she had not told him, one that she had not confessed even at the last!

" You would not have been kept in ignorance long." The attorney's tone was pitying. " Have you forgotten what day tomorrow is?"

" To-morrow?" Storm repeated blankly.

" Your birthday."

" God!" The exclamation came from George. " And the funeral!"

Storm sat as if turned to stone. It had been for him! Her secret trip to town, her innocent, pitiful subterfuges, her joy over the letter which had told her that the surprise she had planned was within her grasp! All for him!

Then a swift revulsion of feeling came. Bah! It may have been to throw more dust in his eyes, to render his confidence in her doubly assured; a sop to her own conscience, perhaps. The infinite reproach in her eyes when he had accused her there in the den, her air of conscious righteousness when she had said: " You will regret that accusation bitterly when you learn the truth." What a consummate actress she had become!

Fate had played into his hands, though; he had witnessed her perfidy with his own eyes. Had it not been for his opportune return that night, how easily his suspicions would have been allayed! How contrite he would have been at his doubt of her and how she and her lover would have gloated over the ease with which he had been deceived!

But the others were looking at him, amazed at his silence and with an effort he pulled himself together.

" Her last thought was for me!" His voice shook with the irony of it, but to the two men it was an evidence of purely natural emotion. " The thought of it only makes what has come harder for me to bear! Her unselfishness, her devotion—"

" I know, boy, I know." Foulkes laid his hand for a moment on Storm's shoulder. " You must try to remember that you have been far luckier than most men; you have

had ten years of such perfect happiness as falls to the lot of few of us!"

" That is true." Storm bowed his head to conceal the sneer of bitterness which rose unbidden to his lips. " I cannot realize that it has come so suddenly, so horribly to an end!"

A brief discussion of business affairs ensued and then Wendle Foulkes took his departure. A silence had fallen between the other two which was broken at last by George.

" So that was it!" he murmured as if to himself. " That was why she invented that luncheon at the Ferndale Inn—"

" What?" demanded Storm, aghast. How much did George know? " Invented what luncheon?"

" Don't you remember when I dined here with you—God! was it only last Monday night?—and Leila told us she had lunched that day at the Ferndale Inn, when in reality she had been to the city? I repeated the remark, because I could scarcely believe my ears, but she stuck to her little fib. I did wonder at your surprise for I had seen you both in town at noon."

" You had—seen us both?" Storm repeated.

" Yes. I was going through Cortlandt Street when just across the way I saw Leila coming out of the Leicester Building and you standing there staring after her as though you had seen a ghost," George explained innocently. " I started to hail you and tried to cross, but a line of traffic got in the way and when the street was clear you had disappeared. I meant to tell you that night, but I didn't."

" Why, that's so! It must have been Leila, after all, whom I saw." Storm weighed each word carefully. " I wasn't sure, you know, she passed me so quickly and when she spoke that night of having been to the Ferndale Inn I naturally concluded that I must have been mistaken; it couldn't have been she whom I saw. It did not occur to me for a moment that she was telling even a little white lie, for Leila has never kept anything from me in all her life, George."

He spoke with deliberate emphasis, trying desperately to eradicate from the other's

mind the thought that he had been aware of her deception. Confound the fellow! Why had he, out of all in the city, been the one to witness that unexpected meeting! His silence later was significant, too. Had he an inkling of Storm's state of mind that night?

"I see. Couldn't imagine why she should have kept her little expedition to herself, but it wasn't any affair of mine, of course." George spoke with an elaborate carelessness which did not seem wholly convincing to the critical ears of the other man. "Funny it should have deceived you, for she didn't take me in for a minute, she fibbed so—so clumsily, bless her!"

"I thought it probably some little joke she was planning but your approaching birthday never occurred to me. It is odd, isn't it, that we should have talked of old Jaffray and that trout-stream when you walked to the station with me later."

"Leila knew how I had set my heart upon it," Storm returned. It would do no good to revert to the topic of the lie. Reiterated explanation of his attitude would only deepen any suspicion which George might still entertain. To ignore it, to pass it by as a thing of no moment was the only course. "Do you remember that she complained of feeling ill that night?"

George nodded.

"That was the first thing I thought of when Millard broke the news to me, after I could begin to think at all," he observed; "She must have had a warning that one of those attacks was coming on. I spoke of it to her, as you may recall, but she denied it; afraid of worrying you, I suppose. To think that it should have come the very next night when she was alone, and helpless!"

Storm drew a deep breath. At least, George had no shadow of a suspicion as to the real cause of her death.

"Don't talk about it!" he implored. "I've reproached myself a hundred times with not being at hand, but how could I know?"

"Forgive me! You couldn't, of course. No one could have anticipated it. It was to be, that's all one can say, though God only knows why! You were not to blame."

He threw his arm across the other's shoulders in an affectionate, consoling clasp and in his mild, candid eyes Storm read only pity, sorrow, and an abiding trustfulness.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BREWSTERS CALL.

"**I** AM the resurrection and the life—" The white-frocked minister's voice rose solemnly above the subdued rustlings and sighing whispers in the little vine-wreathed church, and the stirring ceased. A robin peered in at one of the open windows from his perch on a maple bough and chirped inquisitively, and the scent of lilacs was wafted in from the rector's garden to mingle with the heavier fragrance of lilies and white roses heaped about the casket at the altar steps.

It was such a small casket, almost like that of a child, and fairly buried beneath the weight of the floral offerings which banked it; a varied collection of offerings, for the costliest of hothouse set pieces mingled with sheaves of home-grown blossoms, and rare orchids nestled beside humble wild violets, but each had their place.

The congregation, too, was a heterogeneous one. Rich and poor, smart and shabby, the country club colony and the villagers met in a common democracy to do honor to their dead friend.

"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away—" The minister went on to the end and then the voices of a hidden choir chanted softly:

"Lord, Thou hast been our refuge: from one generation to another."

In the front pew Norman Storm rested his sleek head upon his black-gloved hand and George Holworthy beside him cleared his throat huskily. In the moment of stillness which followed the psalm a woman's sob rose from somewhere back in the church, the sound jangling in Storm's ears like a touch upon naked nerves.

The last act of the farce, and then peace! Peace in which to plan for the future, to gain strength with which to shut out vain,

maddening memories, to meet and cope with the change which his own act had wrought in his life. But would peace come?

Everything had gone smoothly, his scheme to evade justice and preserve himself from danger had been crowned with success, but in fortifying himself against suspicion and accusation from outside, he had not thought that a more subtle enemy might arise to be faced and vanquished or forever hold him in miserable thrall.

His love for Leila had not died with her. Despite her unfaithfulness, to the thought of which he clung doggedly, he could not exorcise her gentle influence. Everything in the house spoke mutely to him of her, everywhere he turned were evidences of her care and thoughtfulness and charm.

In vain he reminded himself that it was over and done with, a closed chapter never to be recalled. He was beginning to fear himself, to dread the hours of solitude ahead as much as he looked forward to them. The voice of his conscience was whispering, threatening, and he must silence it or know no peace.

George glanced furtively at him now and then as the service went on, but he gave no sign. It drew to a close at last and still he sat there immersed in his own thoughts until a touch upon his arm roused him to a consciousness of the present.

Half-way down the aisle Richard and Julie Brewster, with exalted faces and hands clasped like children, stood aside to let him pass, but he did not even see them, and those who pressed forward and would have spoken paused at sight of his face. Pitying, shocked murmurs followed him as he and George stepped into the car, but he did not heed them and the long ride to the cemetery progressed in silence.

The brief, simple service of committal, the clods of earth falling dully, heavily into the grave, and then came the interminable drive home. George's glances were less furtive now, more openly charged with amazement.

Storm had not shed a tear, had not vouchsafed an utterance of emotion throughout those solemn hours. His friend wondered how great the reaction would be from such long-pent-up grief, and as they

swept into the driveway before the silent, empty house which awaited them he ventured a suggestion.

"Norman, don't you want to pack up and come and stay in town with me for a few days? The change will do you good and give you time to — to get used to things."

Storm stifled the exasperated rejoinder which rose to his lips and replied quietly:

"Thanks, old man, but I want to be here, alone. I've got to face facts sooner or later, to bring myself to a realization that she has gone, and I'm better off here."

"Well, maybe that's so," George conceded. "Country air's the best, and I'll run out now and then to cheer you up. You'll take to playing golf again after a bit—"

"Don't!" The cry was wrung from Storm's very soul. Never again would he hold a golf-stick in his hands! He could see now before him that driver with the dark stains spattered upon it and he recoiled shuddering from the apparition, while George inwardly cursed his own tactlessness, the while wholly ignorant of how his clumsy, well-meant effort at consolation had pierced the armor of the other man's self-control.

The fickle May sunshine vanished and before the coming of twilight a bank of heavy gray clouds formed in the west, presaging a storm. They made a pretense of dining while the rising wind swept gustily about the house and moaned in the chimneys like a thing in pain.

Storm still preserved his stoic calm and George's perturbation grew. It wasn't natural, wasn't like the Norman he had known from college days. The younger man had always been outwardly reserved, but such stern, almost deliberate self-repression was new to him and filled his friend with vague alarm.

"You didn't close your eyes during the night before last and you couldn't have slept much last night, Norman, for I heard you walking the floor at all hours," he remarked. "Don't you think it would be well to call in Carr and have him look you over and give you something quieting? You'll be ill if you keep this up."

"I'm all right!" Storm responded with a touch of impatience. "Don't worry about me, George. I'll turn in early and by tomorrow I'll get a fresh grip on myself—"

"I think you've got too tight a grip on yourself as it is," George interrupted.

"What do you mean?" Storm shot the question at him almost fiercely. Was he under surveillance, his every mood and gesture subject to analysis? Why couldn't the other let him alone?

"You're not meeting this normally," replied George in all seriousness. "Hang it all, I'd rather see you violent than like this! There's something horrible about your calmness, the way you are clamping down your feelings! If you would just give way—"

"I can't," Storm protested in the first wholly honest speech which had passed his lips. "I'm all frozen up. For God's sake don't nag me, George, I'm about all in!"

The other subsided, but Storm could feel his eyes upon him, and their mute solicitude drove him to an inward frenzy. At all costs he must get away from that insistent scrutiny! He would lock himself in his room, feign sleep, illness, anything! George had served his turn and Storm thanked fortune that business would of necessity demand the fussy, faithful, little man's presence in town the next day.

He was casting about for an excuse as they rose from the table when all at once the front-door knocker sounded faintly, almost apologetically.

"I can't see any one! I won't!" The haggard lines deepened about Storm's mouth. "In Heaven's name, can't they respect my—my grief? I'm going up-stairs. George, you get rid of them. Send them away, whoever they are!"

But George did not send them away. Listening from above Storm heard the front door open and close, heard George's low rumble, and a reply in higher but softly modulated feminine tones. Then came a masculine voice which made him grip the stair-rail in sudden fury not unmixed with consternation.

Richard Brewster! It couldn't be, the fellow would not dare intrude his presence here, even though he fancied his secret un-

shared by any living soul! But that was unmistakably Julie's voice raised in almost tearful pleading and then Brewster spoke again.

What had brought them here? Why hadn't George get rid of them as he had been told to do? Could it be that Julie had discovered the truth of her husband's unfaithfulness and with a woman's hysterical notion of justice had brought Brewster here to force his confession to the man he had wronged?

It was evident from the sound that reached his ears that George was showing them into the library, was taking it upon himself to disregard Storm's express commands. Damn them all! Why couldn't they let him alone? A brief colloquy ensued and then George mounted the stairs.

"Look here!" he began in a sepulchral whisper. "It's the Brewsters, Norman, and I think you ought to see them for a minute. There's something they want to tell you—"

"I don't want to hear it!" interrupted Storm fiercely. "Good God, man! can't you see I'm in no condition to listen to a lot of vapid condolences? I told you to send them away!"

"I would have done so but I think you ought to let them tell you," George insisted with the meek, unyielding tenacity which the other man had always found exasperating. "Julie Brewster is terribly wrought up; she says that in justice to —to Leila's memory you must hear what she has to say."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRUTH.

IN justice to Leila's memory! Storm gave a sudden, involuntary start. There could be no ambiguity about that phrase. With a feeling as if the world were crashing down about his ears, he thrust George unceremoniously aside and descended the stairs.

They were standing side by side on the hearthrug awaiting him, Julie in tears but with her face bravely lifted to his, Brewster meeting his eyes without a tremor.

"It is good of you to see us, Mr. Storm." Julie was making an obvious effort to control her emotion. "We wouldn't have intruded, but I wanted you to know the truth; I couldn't bear the thought that the shadow of even the slightest misunderstanding should rest between you and—and Leila's memory now, especially when it was all my fault."

"Your fault?" Storm repeated. "Sit down, please. I don't understand—"

"We won't detain you long, old man." It was Brewster who spoke, but his words failed to pierce the tumult in the other's brain. "We felt it would comfort you as much as anything could to know that almost her last thought on earth had been for the happiness of others."

Storm's eyes had never left the woman's face and to their mute command she responded:

"I'm not going to try your patience with a long story of my own foolishness, but I did a wicked, selfish thing in dragging poor Leila into my troubles just to save myself. She was so generous, so self-sacrificing that she did not murmur at the risk to herself, and I never realized until she—she was dead that I might have been the cause of a misunderstanding between you at the very last. It has almost killed me to think of it, and I simply had to come and tell you the truth about the whole affair!"

Storm tried to collect his reeling senses, but only one clear thought came to his rescue. These people must never know, never suspect that any trouble had arisen between him and Leila. He steadied his voice with an effort at composure.

"I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Brewster. If my poor wife was able to help you out of any difficulty—I am glad, but I know nothing of it. You speak of a risk—?"

"Yes. I have been very foolish—willy-nilly, blindly foolish—in the way I've acted for weeks past." She paused and then hurried on shamefacedly. "You see, I thought Dick was neglecting me, and to pay him out I've been flirting outrageously with Ted Mattison. Leila tried to influence me but I wouldn't listen to her and when

Dick woke up to what was going on and ordered me to not even speak to Ted again I—I resented it and defied him.

"Last Monday I motored out to the Ferndale Inn for lunch alone with Ted, and some horrid, gossipy people were there who knew how I'd been trotting about. I didn't think they had caught a glimpse of Ted then, but I was sure that if they had recognized me they would put two and two together and tell Dick, and I was afraid; terribly afraid, for Dick had threatened to leave me if I disobeyed him.

"As soon as I reached home that afternoon I rushed to Leila, told her the whole thing and made her promise to say that she had been to the inn with me. It never occurred to me that that promise would make her tell you a lie; I'm afraid I didn't think about anything except the trouble I was in and how to get out of it."

So that was it! They had come to explain about that paltry lie! Brewster dared to stand there while his wife made her trivial confession, while all the time—A turbulent flame of rage arose in Storm's heart, but he quelled it vigorously. Caution, now! Brewster must not suspect!

"I knew that my wife had not been with you." Could that be his own voice speaking with such quiet restraint? "In fact, I had seen her myself in town at noon, although she did not know it. Please don't distress yourself further, Mrs. Brewster; I knew what her errand was in town and why she wished to keep it from me."

"Oh!" Julie stared for a moment and then added miserably: "Leila was sure that you guessed she had fibbed to you. The very next day—the last day of her life—she begged me to absolve her from her promise, for she said you had seemed so strange and cold to her that morning, she was afraid you suspected and it was the first time she had ever told you an untruth!"

"She must have imagined a change in my attitude," Storm said hastily. "I was preoccupied and in a hurry to get to town, but that little white lie never gave me a moment's uneasiness. I would have chaffed her about it only I did not want to spoil her surprise."

"Surprise!" Julie echoed.

"Yes. When I had seen her in town the day before she was just coming out of Alpheus Jaffray's office in the Leicester Building." He felt a measure of grim satisfaction at Brewster's uncontrollable start. "She had been there to arrange to purchase from him the trout-stream which adjoins the property here and which he had refused to sell me; you know as well as all the rest of the crowd what a veritable feud has existed between the old fellow and me. I learned the truth from my attorney, whom Leila had consulted previously about the transaction. My poor wife intended it as a birthday surprise for me. My birthday is to-day—to-day!"

He turned away to hide the rage which was fast getting beyond his control at the smug, hypocritical presence of that other man, but his emotion was misread by both his companions.

"To-day! How terrible for you, Storm!" began Brewster, but his wife sobbed.

"If Leila had only guessed! But that untruth made her positively wretched! Why, when I telephoned to her late that night and she came out to meet me—"

"You telephoned to her! She met you—" The room whirled and grew black before Storm's eyes and the woman's voice, although clear and distinct, seemed to come from far away.

"Yes. I'd had a terrible row with Dick when he came home that night and I knew he had heard something more about Ted, though I didn't know what. I was nearly crazy, Mr. Storm, and when he rushed out of the house in anger, I phoned Leila and begged her to meet me and help me; tell me what to do!

"She had promised that afternoon to come to me if I needed her. You had gone to the station with Mr. Holworthy when I called up and Leila did meet me, at the edge of the golf course.

"She urged me to tell Dick everything, but I wouldn't. I might just as well have done so, though, for those horrid people had seen Ted with me at the Inn, after all, and they went straight to Dick the next day. If only I hadn't persuaded Leila to lie for me! It wasn't any use and it

made some of her last hours unhappy. I shall never forgive myself—never! Oh, don't look at me like that, Mr. Storm! I can't bear it!"

Storm had slowly risen from his chair, one hand clutching the table edge as though for support, his eyes fixed in an unwavering gaze of horror at the one thing visible in the whirling vortex about him; the white face of Julie. In his dazed brain a hideous fact was taking shape and form, and his soul cowered before it.

He essayed to speak, but no sound issued from his dry lips and Brewster stepped forward.

"Try not to blame Julie too much, old man," he begged. "You see, the poor little girl was desperate. I was as much at fault in the situation between us as she was; your dear wife showed me that and brought me to reason. The last act of her life was to save me from wrecking both mine and Julie's, and we can never be grateful enough to her memory. That is why we had to come here to-night to tell you."

Slowly Storm's gaze shifted to the other man's face and the inexorable truth of Brewster's sincerity was forced upon his wretched consciousness. Still he could find no words, and the other continued:

"When I confronted Julie and she stuck to her story, I came here to your wife to confirm the truth of what I had heard. She was loyal to Julie; she tried to make me believe that she had accompanied her to the inn, but she was too inherently honest to brave it out and I practically tricked her into admitting the truth.

"I was going to rush home then in my jealous rage and break with Julie forever, but your wife restrained me, Storm; she convinced me that Julie hadn't done anything really wrong, anything that I could not forgive, and showed me where I, too, had been at fault in neglecting her for my business, even though it was for her that I wanted to succeed. She made me see that we could begin all over again on a firmer basis even than before, just when I thought everything was ended and the future held nothing but separation and despair.

"I can't tell you what it meant to me, that quiet talk with your wife here in

this very room! It was Tuesday night, you know, and death must have come to her shortly after. I can't realize it even now; she seemed so radiant, so splendidly alive! I'll never forget what she did for me, and if I thought that—that the excitement of our interview—I'm afraid I made rather a scene! If it hurt her, brought on that stroke, or fainting spell—"

"No. It was a form of catalepsy, you know." A totally strange voice was speaking in a monotonous, dragging undertone. Storm did not recognize it as his own. Blind instinct alone braced him to a last effort to dissemble. "No one could predict when it was coming on or what caused it. No one to blame."

The lie died in his throat, and all at once he began to tremble violently as if the chill of the grave itself were upon him. He caught at the table again, his whole body shaking, collapsing, and with a harsh strangling cry the floodgates were opened at last. Sinking to his knees, he buried his face in his arms lest the guilt which consumed him be revealed, and sobbed out his anguish unrestrained.

He did not feel Julie's arms about him, her tears against his cheek, nor know when her husband led her gently away. He was face to face with the warped and blackened thing which was his soul, and with that vision he descended to the nethermost depths.

CHAPTER XVII.

BACK IN HARNESS.

WHEN Storm came to himself he was lying on the library couch with the gray dawn seeping in at the curtained windows and George's rotund figure in the hideous, striped bathrobe looming up grotesquely from an improvised bed formed of two armchairs.

Storm felt a vague sense of irritation. What was he doing there, dressed save for his shoes and collar, instead of being in pajamas in his own bed, and why was George hanging around?

Then the mists of sleep cleared from his brain and remembrance came.

Leila was innocent, and he had killed her! True to him in every act and word and thought, yet he had flung a monstrous accusation at her, and struck her down. His Leila! He saw her again as she lay huddled at his feet and could have cried aloud in his anguish.

If he could but take back that blow! If only it were given him to live over once more the time which had passed since he saw her on that crowded street and doubt first entered his mind! If he could only speak to her, tell her—

Then a measure of sanity returned to him. She was dead. He had killed her. Nothing could alter that, nothing could bring her back. No reparation, no expiation would undo his mad act and restore the life that he had taken.

If he himself were to live, to go on, he must put behind him all thought of the past; crush back this creeping menace of remorse which threatened to overwhelm him. Regret would avail him nothing now. He had loved the woman who had shared his life for ten years, but she was gone and the future was before him, long years in which, since he could not atone, he must school himself to forget.

At least no one would ever suspect the secret which he carried in his heart. The worst was over; he had fooled them all! But with the thought a new terror gripped him by the throat. What had he done; what had he said when the revelation of Leila's innocence swept him from his moorings of self-control?

The Brewsters had been there, both of them, staring at him as though the ghost of Leila herself had risen to accuse him! George must have been hovering about somewhere, too; must have taken care of him, helped him to the couch, watched over him throughout those hours of unconsciousness, and listened! Great God! Had he betrayed himself? What might he not have said?

The light was growing brighter now, bringing out the familiar shapes of the furniture against the gloom and revealing in startling clarity the tired lines in the relaxed face of his self-appointed nurse. Storm sat up and scrutinized it half-fear-

fully. Could George sleep like that, exhausted though he might well be, if he had gained an inkling of the truth?

It seemed impossible and yet Storm felt that he must know the worst. A direct accusation, even, would be better than this suspense. The first look would tell, the first glance that passed between them.

Storm coughed and George's eyes opened sleepily, wandered vaguely about, and then as they came to bear on the upright figure on the couch, warmed with a sudden clear light of affectionate compassion.

"Norman, old boy, how do you feel? Can I get you anything?"

Storm sank back with a sigh of relief.

"No. I—a drink of water—" he mumbled and closed his eyes as George rose and padded off in his flapping slippers down the hall. There still remained the Brewsters, and his sudden collapse in their presence was enough of itself to arouse their suspicion aside from the wild words which might have issued unbidden from his lips. He must learn what had taken place!

When George returned with the glass, Storm drained it and then asked weakly:

"Went to pieces, didn't I?"

"You sure did, but it was coming to you," George affirmed. "You're all right now though, so just rest and try not to think of anything. Carr fixed you up in good shape—"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Storm. "Carr! I didn't even know he was here! How did you get rid of the Brewsters?"

"Well, it wasn't easy!" A faint smile lighted George's tired face. "Dick's got sense enough, but that little scatter-brained wife of his wanted to stay and take care of you! It was all I could do to persuade her to go home."

"And all that while I was making an exhibition of myself before them!" Storm exclaimed bitterly.

"You were not," retorted George. "You broke down, of course, just as I knew you must, sooner or later. I hadn't been easy in my mind about you all day and I didn't like the look on your face when you went down to the library to see them, so I stuck around; not eavesdropping, old boy, but to be at hand in case you needed me. I could

hear your voices, and then you gave a kind of a cry and I butted in.

"I found Julie fussing over you and I motioned to her husband to get her away into the drawing-room. He came back and we put you on the couch and that's all there is to it. I told them to stop in at Carr's and send him here on their way home."

"What did I say? I mean," Storm hastily amended, "I don't remember anything. Julie and Dick came to tell me how Leila had brought them together again when they were on the point of a separation. You remember when she told us that she had been out to the Ferndale Inn with Julie? That wasn't only to keep her visit to old Jaffray's office secret, but because she had promised Julie to lie for her.

"They thought I might have misunderstood, and that it would comfort me to know she had made peace between them, but instead it—it broke me up! The full realization came over me of all I had lost and I went off my head, I guess. Tell me what I said, George?"

"Why, nothing! You just—hang it all, man, you gave way to your feelings, that's all! You didn't *say* anything," George replied uncomfortably. "When the doctor came he gave you a good stiff hypodermic and you dropped off to sleep like a baby. You're bound to feel rocky, you know, but you're over the worst of it!"

"Poor old George!" With renewed confidence there came to Storm a twinge of compunction. "You look as though you needed the doctor yourself! You must have had a rotten night."

"Never you mind about me!" returned George gruffly. "Here! Carr said you were to take this when you woke up and not to talk too much."

Obediently, Storm took the medicine and almost immediately drifted off into troubled sleep.

It was broad noon when he awakened once more with the fragrant odor of coffee in the air and George standing before him, dressed for departure.

"Sorry, old boy, but I've got to run up to town, you know. You'll be all right for a few hours and I'll be back before

night. Drink your coffee, take a cold bath and get out on the veranda in the sun. Nobody'll bother you; I've seen to that."

Storm tried faintly to protest against George's return; he didn't need any care; he would be better off alone, and the other mustn't neglect his business affairs any longer. But George was not to be swerved from his purpose and after a few hours of solitude, Storm was in a mood to welcome his return. In his weakened state he did not find it easy to keep his truant thoughts from straying to the past and a horror which he was unable to combat made him shun his own society.

For the next few days while the flood of condolences still poured in he clung to George as to an anchor, but when the last dismal conventions had been observed and the household had settled down to something like order, his old feeling of irritation against his friend returned. George's eternal pussy-footing about the house as though death yet lingered there, his lugubrious face and labored attempts at cheer and consolation became insupportable and his host breathed a sigh of relief when he ultimately departed.

Spring advanced and with returning strength, Storm's nerves steadied and secure in the knowledge that his guilt was buried forever, he took up the daily round once more.

A week after the funeral, he returned to his sinecure at the offices of the Mammoth Trust Company. The neighbors, possibly because of George's forewarning, had left him considerably alone in the interim, but now as he stood on the station platform awaiting his customary train for the city, the ubiquitous Millard advanced, beaming.

"By Jove, this is good, old chap! Glad you are getting back into harness again; best thing for you!" he exclaimed. "Fine weather we're having now, and the course is in wonderful condition; never better! I'm in topping form, if I do say it, haven't missed a day."

Despite his volubility, there was an odd constraint in his manner and Storm eyed him curiously. Could it be a latent suspicion?

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"You'll be going in for the tournament?" he inquired briefly.

"Surest thing you know! Too bad you—" Millard caught himself up. "I say, though, why don't you get up early now and then and play a round or two with me before breakfast? Nobody else out then and it would do you no end of good. How about to-morrow?"

Storm shook his head, checking the shudder which came involuntarily at the suggestion.

"Thanks, but I'm not quite up to it. I think I'll let golf alone for a while," he replied, adding hastily as he saw signs of remonstrance in the other's face. "I've got too much to do, reinvestments to make and that sort of thing."

"Of course," Millard nodded. "You'll have your hands full, but you would find that an occasional round would set you up wonderfully. Nothing like it to straighten you out and take your mind off things. Just phone me if you feel like it any day, old chap, and I'll join you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ESCAPE.

THE appearance of several belated fellow-commuters saved Storm from the necessity of a reply and as they came up to greet him he eyed each in turn furtively.

They were cordial enough but none alluded directly to his bereavement, and the same constraint was evident in their bearing that Millard had manifested. He continued to study them on the train from behind the shelter of his newspaper. Unmistakable relief had registered itself on their faces when the train came, and now a few of them were ostentatiously buried in the market reports but for the most part in groups of two and three they were discussing their business affairs and to the listener their tones seemed unnecessarily raised. Not one had ventured to take the vacant seat beside him.

Had the Brewsters spread broadcast the story of his emotional outburst in their presence, and could it have occasioned remark,

started vague rumor and conjecture which might yet lead to the discovery of the truth? In vain he told himself that he was overanalytical, that these old friends shrank not from him but from dilating upon his tragic loss. To his apprehensive imagination their manner held a deeper significance than that of mere masculine inability to voice their sympathy, and with gnawing persistency the menacing possibilities rankled in his brain.

At the office, after the formal condolences of his associates, Storm slipped mechanically into the old, well-ordered routine, but here, too, he fancied that he was being eyed askance. He could at least avoid running the gantlet of his clubs for a time without occasioning any remark, but the thought of Greenlea itself and all that it held for him had become obnoxious, hideous! The return to that empty house day after day; could he endure it without going mad?

He caught the club-car in a mood of surly defiance, but he had scarcely taken his accustomed place when Richard Brewster appeared, and, without waiting for an invitation, seated himself beside him.

"Awfully glad to see you on the job again." He spoke heartily, and his beaming face corroborated his words. "We were worried about you, you know, the other night; Julie wanted to stay and take care of you, but Holworthy wouldn't hear of it. I hope you've forgiven us for intruding."

Storm eyed him watchfully, but the guileless friendliness of the younger man was patent, and the other sighed in relief.

"I understand your motive, and I thank you both for coming," he said after a moment's pause. "Sorry I lost control of myself, but I'd been keeping up for so long—"

"It was only natural," Brewster interrupted. "You'll be leaving us, I suppose, for a time anyway, as soon as you've got the estate settled. We'll miss you—"

"Leaving?" Storm stared.

"You'll go away for a—a rest, won't you? New scenes and all that sort of thing? It will be hard for you to go on here—" The younger man broke off, adding hastily: "Julie was saying only this morning at breakfast that if you decided to keep the

house open you would need a housekeeper, and she knows of a splendid woman, an elderly widow in reduced circumstances—"

Storm halted him with an abrupt gesture of negation.

"I haven't made any plans yet, Brewster. The maids I've got are used to my ways and capable of running things temporarily, although it will be necessary to make other arrangements, of course, if I decide to remain in Greenlea." The reply was mechanical, for his thoughts were busied with the new vista which the other's assumption had opened before his mental vision. "I am grateful to Mrs. Brewster for her interest, and if I need the woman of whom she spoke I will let her know. Just now I am drifting; I haven't looked ahead."

Barker met him as usual at the station and during the short drive home he glanced about him at the smug, familiar scene with a buoyant sense of coming escape. To get away! To cut loose now, at once, from all these prying people, the petty social intercourse, the thousand and one things which reminded him of Leila and of what he had done!

The revulsion of feeling from the contentment of past years which had swept over him that day culminated with a sudden rush of hatred for it all. The house loomed before him a veritable nightmare, and the coming days had appeared each a separate ordeal from the prospect of which he shrank with unutterable loathing.

He had felt chained to the old order of things by the fear of arousing suspicion if he ran away precipitately, but the one man of whose opinion he had been most apprehensive had himself suggested the way out as the most natural course in the world.

Storm could have laughed at his uneasiness of the morning; the other fellows had been merely embarrassed, that was all, reluctant to mention his tragic bereavement, and trying with awkward constraint to bridge over the chasm. If they took it for granted, as Brewster did, that he would seek a temporary change of scene, the main obstacle was removed from his path. It would be a simple matter to sell the house and then the world would be before him.

On the hall table he found a letter from

George Holworthy, and tore it open with an absent-minded smile. He would soon be free even from old George. He read:

DEAR NORMAN:

Tried to get out to see you to-night, but must meet Abbott. Had a talk with Jim Potter yesterday. The firm has ordered him to the coast immediately, and he is winding up his affairs here, and wants to get rid of his apartment. Willing to rent furnished, just as it stands, cheap, until his lease is up in October. It is a bulky little place up on the Drive, and the stuff he has there is all a fellow would want to keep bachelor's hall. Why don't you take it off his hands and close up the house out there? Jim will take his man with him, but you can get another, and New York is the best little old summer resort in the world. Take my advice and get out of that place for a while anyway. I told Jim I'd write you, but you've got to speak quick if you want to take him up on it. Think it over.

Yours,
GEORGE.

Storm folded the letter slowly. He knew Potter, knew the comfortable, even luxurious, sort of place his ease-loving soul would have demanded, yet he had wished to go farther afield. The first thought of escape had entailed a vague dream of other countries; South America, perhaps, or the Far East, but now he forced himself sternly back to the realities of the situation.

Such an adventure would mean money, more ready cash than he could command at the moment. It would mean waiting until the house was sold, and burning his bridges as far as the trust company was concerned. Moreover, the few thousands the house would bring would not last long, and unless he connected with new business wherever he went, he had nothing to fall back upon but the beggarly three thousand a year which was left from his share of his father's estate. He must convert the capital into cash, and Foulkes had warned him that that would take time. Could he wait there, within those four walls which had witnessed what he had done?

He dined in a meditative silence, oblivious to the anxious ministrations of Agnes. The empty place opposite, the chair in its new, unaccustomed position against the wall, the silence and shadows all worked upon his mood.

Potter's quarters in town would at least

bear no reminders to mock and accuse him at every turn, and drag his treacherous thoughts back to a past which must be buried. He would be free, too, from Brewster, and Millard, and the rest of them, but on the other hand George would be constantly thrusting his society upon him.

Undecided, he wandered out to the veranda, but the vines which Leila had tended peered at him over the rail and whispered together; in the library her books, her desk, the foolish, impractical reading-lamp she had bought for him, all mutely recalled her vanished presence. There remained only the drawing-room where her body had lain, the den.

With a shudder he turned and mounted the stairs. The blank, closed door of her room stared at him, and within his own were evidences on every hand of feminine thoughtfulness and care. Her influence vibrated like a living thing, all about him, clutching him by the throat, smothering him. Anything, anywhere would be preferable to this.

It was only half past nine. He could not go to the country club, he shrank from the society of any of his neighbors; he could neither sleep, nor read, nor find a corner which did not cry aloud of Leila, Leila! There would be other nights like this, weeks of them.

In swift rebellion he descended to the library, seized the telephone, and asked for a number.

"Mr. Holworthy, please. That you, George? Yes, Norman. I've got your letter, and you're right. I can't stand it out here. I'll take Potter's rooms at his own price, and I want possession by Monday. All right, fix it, will you? No, but it's got on my nerves; I can't go on; I—it's hell!"

CHAPTER XIX.

CHANGE OF SCENE.

TOLD you you'd like it here." George Holworthy crossed one pudgy knee over the other and eyed his friend's back at the window with immense satisfaction. "Old Jim certainly knows how to live, doesn't he, from percolators to night-lights?

You'll be mighty comfortable here, Norman."

Storm turned slowly from his contemplation of the shadowed park below, the broad sweep of river and twinkle of the Palisades beyond.

"It's great!" he declared briefly, but with a ringing, buoyant note which had long been absent from his tones. "I tell you, George, old boy, I feel like a new man already! I never knew until now how stagnant a backwater like Greenlea can make a fellow become. Same old trains, same old country club, same old crowd of petty-minded busybodies. Lord! I don't see how I stood it all these years."

The outburst was spontaneous, and not until he saw the look of reproachful amazement which crossed George's face did he realize that he had lowered his guard.

"You were happy," ventured George.

"Of course," Storm hastened to acquiesce. "That made all the difference. But alone—"

He shrugged and turned away lest the other read too clearly the change which had come with his escape from the scene of his crime. Significant of that change was the fact that he could think of his deed as a crime now without shrinking. After the first shock of horror and remorse had passed together with the fear of detection, a sense of triumph began to dominate him, a sort of pride in himself and his achievement.

He had hoodwinked them all. He, who had fancied himself a weakling merely because luck had been against him in the past, had proved his strength, his invincibility now. Old George, sitting there so placidly, blinking at him with those good-natured, near-sighted eyes of his; how little he suspected, how little he could ever suspect of the truth. The rest of them, with their smug condolences and pity. Gad! how easy it had been.

"What do you think of Homachi?" George's question broke in upon his self-congratulation.

"The Jap you got for me? He's an improvement on Agnes, I can tell you." Storm opened the bronze humidor and offered it. "Smoke? You've no idea how that girl's sniffling got on my nerves. Of course I

appreciated her feelings, but hang it all, a man can't buck up and carry on with other people constantly thrusting his own sorrow at him.

"Homachi is a cheerful, grinning little cuss, and he certainly can make an omelet. Come up and have breakfast some Sunday morning and you'll see."

"Thanks," George spoke, a trifle dryly. "Glad you like him. Have you made any plans yet about the disposition of the Greenlea house?"

The constraint in his tone warned Storm that for the second time he had shown his hand too plainly, and he forced a look of pained surprise.

"Disposition of the house?" he echoed. "Heavens, no! It's closed up, of course, and I've left MacWhirter there as caretaker. It was one of Leila's last wishes, you know, to give him employment when he came out of the Base Hospital. I hadn't dreamed of disposing of it; I couldn't bear to think of strangers in her garden, under her roof, in the home she so loved.

"If I'm glad to be out of it; it's not that I am callous, but that everything about it affects me too much, George. You ought to be able to understand. If I hug my grief I'll just simply go under, and Leila herself wouldn't want that."

"I do understand, old man." George's voice trembled now with quick sympathy, and Storm hid a smile of relief. "You're trying to be brave for her sake, and it is fine of you. Stay away from the place by all means while it makes you feel that way. You could do worse than take a lease here for yourself next year when Jim's expires."

Storm shook his head.

"I've been thinking that I'd like to take a trip somewhere, later on," he said slowly, watching the other's face through narrowed lids. "A long trip; China, or South America, or away up north. I could come back and start all over again."

"But your position with the trust company?" George sputtered. "They couldn't put a man in your place and then oust him for you when you came back."

"I wouldn't expect them to," Storm responded. "To tell you the truth, I feel that I've been stagnating there, too. It's a sine-

cure, and I've been content to drift along, sure of the income and not taking chances, but I'm responsible for no one else now, and I can afford a risk."

George rose.

"Don't do anything rash," he advised. "Fifteen thousand a year is a mighty safe little bet in these uncertain times, and you've never known what it is to get out for yourself, you know. You've got the habit of luxury—"

"And no business head? Thanks," drawled his host pleasantly. "I'm not going to make a fool of myself and kill the goose until I find golden eggs elsewhere. That notion of a trip was just an impulse. I may get over this restless fit and settle down here permanently, after all. I like these rooms of Jim's, and town looks good to me."

Nevertheless, the next day found him in Wendle Foulkes's office facing the keen old attorney with an air of quiet command which brooked no expostulation.

"How long will it take you to convert my securities into cash?" he demanded. "When we talked about it a fortnight ago I listened to you because of my wife, but now I've only myself to consider, and I have a right to take a risk if I feel inclined with my own."

"Of course you have, my boy," Foulkes returned slowly. "I have gone beyond my province, perhaps, in trying to influence you, but I promised your father—however, I've nothing more to say. I will have the cash for you in ten days. You have exactly fifty thousand dollars, on which you've been getting six per cent; I hope you'll be able to better it."

"Thanks." Storm was conscious of an air of defeat in the old man's manner, and he resented it vaguely, then shrugged. What did it matter, anyway? He would be free from this pettifogging nuisance soon enough. "About the other matter—"

"You mean Leila's estate?" Foulkes's tone softened. "I have the papers all here for you to look over. We must advertise for claims for six months, of course; a mere formality, in this case, and then what she left can be turned over to you."

"She had just fourteen thousand when

she married you, and spent eleven of it. Here are the accounts. It was a matter of pride with her to buy your Christmas and birthday presents with her own money, Norman, and I couldn't gainsay her. Two thousand went for that black pearl scarf-pin, three thousand—"

"Don't!" Storm cried sharply. "I don't want to hear all that! You can send the papers up to my rooms. Can't you see—"

He stopped with a gesture of repugnance, and the attorney, ignorant of the source of his emotion, nodded compassionately.

"I know, my boy, but I want you to see how matters stand. There are three thousand left of the principal, which were to have been paid to Jaffray for that land adjoining yours, and accrued interest on the constantly depleted original capital, which aggregates almost as much again. Her estate, roughly speaking, will amount to between five and six thousand dollars; I'll send you the exact figures."

"I don't care about them! I'm not thinking of what she left, it isn't that." Storm rose, unable to meet the kindly gaze of the older man. "I only want to get the whole thing settled and done with. I can't bear to discuss it; these details are horrible, impossible for me to contemplate sanely just yet."

"I quite understand, Norman, but they must be attended to, you know." Foulkes rose and held out his hand. "I'll render you an accounting in six months, and then it will be over."

"About your own affairs. You have never taken the advice I volunteered with very good grace, and I shall not offer any now. I am getting old and you are no longer a boy; you know your own mind. However, if in the future you feel the need of disinterested counsel or help you know where to come for it."

"Thank you, sir." Storm felt an odd sense of contrition. "I'm not going into that South American scheme. I shall look around before deciding definitely on what I have in mind, and I'm sorry if I have seemed to resent your interest in the past. A man can't be in leading strings all his life, you know, and I have a good, conservative proposition now."

He had. Storm chuckled grimly to himself as he departed. Fifty thousand would carry him far away, give him a year or two of utterly care-free existence, and leave a respectable sum to start in some fresh venture. The European countries were practically bankrupt; a little cash would bring monumental returns, and in some continental capital he would start a new life.

Just as the thought of escape from Greenlea had made his surroundings there suddenly intolerable, so now the contemplation of utter freedom and a wider vista brought with it an impatience, a longing for instant action. The lease on Potter's rooms, the trumpery five thousand from Leila's estate —these details need not deter or delay him.

Another thought did, however. It was one thing, and a perfectly natural one, under the circumstances, for him to have closed the house and moved to town; it would be quite another question were he to throw up a fifteen-thousand-a-year job, seize all the cash he could lay his hands upon, and rush out of the country. No man in his sane senses would take such a step unless some more urgent and sinister motive actuated him than a mere desire for forgetfulness of grief in strange scenes and a new environment.

Forcing himself to regard it from a detached point of view, he saw the madness of that course. His imagination conjured up the blank amazement which would ensue not only among the Greenlea people, but in his town clubs, in the trust company. There would be hints that grief had unsettled his reason, then darker whispers still; whispers which would grow in volume until the echo of them reached him wherever he might be, at the uttermost ends of the earth.

He must not spoil it all now by a precipitate move; he must possess his soul in patience until a favorable opportunity presented itself. He had inserted an opening wedge in mentioning his tentative intention to George; in a few weeks he would refer to it again, speaking of it casually but frequent as a trip with definitely planned limitations, and hinting at a sound business proposition which awaited his return. The idea must filter through the clubs and out

to Greenlea, must have become an old story before he finally acted upon it, so that his going would occasion no remark.

Once away, it would be simple enough to cable his instructions regarding the sale of the house and postpone his return from time to time until the old crowd had practically forgotten him. George would remember, but old George wouldn't suspect the truth if he vanished to-morrow.

With the onus of fear lifted from him Storm still shrank from solitude. Decency and convention precluded an immediate return to his clubs, and he desired above all things to avoid the society of those who knew him and the details of the recent tragedy.

He took to satisfying his gregarious need by seeking out-of-the-way hotels and restaurants frequented for the most part by the visiting foreigners who thronged the city, where sitting long over his coffee he could lose himself in the study of his neighbors.

On an evening a few days after his interview with Foulkes he was seated at a table in an old-fashioned French hostelry far downtown, listening to the snatches of staccato conversation which rose above the subdued cadences of the orchestra and watching the scene brilliant with the uniforms of half a dozen nations, when to his annoyance he heard his name uttered in accents of cheery surprise.

Turning swiftly he beheld Millard, flushed and evidently slightly exhilarated, rising from the corner table where he had been seated with a sallow-faced, distinguished-looking stranger in mufti.

CHAPTER XX.

A CHANCE MEETING.

HE bowed coldly and returned with ostentatious deliberation to his entrée, hoping to discourage the other's advance, but Millard was in no mood to comprehend a rebuff.

"By Jove, old chap, delighted to find you here!" He shook Storm's reluctant hand and without invitation pulled out the opposite chair and seated himself. "That's

the boy! Get around a bit and work up an interest in life. No use moping. We miss you out home, but as I told Dick Brewster, change is the thing for you, change—”

“What are you doing here?” Storm interrupted him briskly. “Thought you were wedded to the three forty; it’s been a bully afternoon for golf.”

“Business!” Millard waved a pompous hand toward the table he had just quitted. “Golf’s not in it with high finance, and this is the greatest proposition you ever heard of. Hundred per cent profit in three months and safe as a church; good deal safer than the churches on the other side have been.”

He grinned expansively at his own witicism, then his face clouded dismally.

“Can’t go into it, though; wife won’t hear of it, and you know what it is, Storm, when a woman holds the purse strings. You know how I’m situated.”

Storm nodded. Every one in Greenlea knew that Millard had married a rich woman and suffered the pangs of hope deferred ever since. Then he glanced up and frowned.

“Your friend is coming over,” he remarked in bored impatience. “When you gestured toward him he must have taken it for an invitation.”

“Sall right!” Millard responded easily. “Wonderful chap, Du Chainat. Wonderful proposition. Look here! You spoke of making some reinvestments; here’s chance of a lifetime! Never heard of anything like it! Gilt-edged—”

The stranger had halted by the table, and Millard made as if to rise and then thought better of it.

“Storm, let me present M. Maurice du Chainat. My old pal and neighbor, Mr. Norman Storm.”

The Frenchman bowed with courtly suavity, and Storm could do no less than proffer him a chair and beckon to a waiter.

“Mentioned your little proposition, old chap.” The irrepressible Millard continued, adding airily as a shade of protestation passed over M. du Chainat’s mobile countenance. “Oh, I know it’s confidential, but Storm’s all right. He wants to make some reinvestments, and now’s his golden opportunity.”

“Mr. Millard has told me nothing of the nature of your proposition, *monsieur*,” Storm hastened to reassure the Frenchman. “He merely mentioned it in passing.”

For a long minute M. du Chainat regarded him in courteous but unmistakable appraisal. Then a genial smile lifted the ends of his small, black mustache.

“It is a confidential matter, as M. Millard says, but there is nothing—how do you say?—equivocal concerning it. We of France do not make our transactions ordinarily as you do in America; we discuss, we deliberate, we wait. And yet in this affair which I have undertaken haste is—alas!—of the utmost need. Time is of value; such value that I will pay twice over for three hundred thousand francs.”

“You see, it’s a factory in one of the devastated towns,” Millard interjected eagerly. “Old feud, trying to get ahead of the other fellow. It means sixty thousand in our money, and the French government’s giving him a grant of a hundred and twenty thousand in three months, but it means ruin to wait. Other man’s got his capital now—”

“But, my friend, M. Storm is perhaps not interested; we bore him,” M. du Chainat interrupted. “The letter which our consul here has given me to your great banker, M. Whitmarsh, has interested him to such an extent that the affair is all but closed.”

“Whitmarsh?” Storm pricked up his ears. The proposition must be good if that most astute of international financiers considered it.

“But yes.” The Frenchman shrugged deprecatingly. “It is, of course, a trifling matter to engage his attention, but I am to have a second interview with him to-morrow at three. I shall be happy to conclude my mission, for there is attached to it the sentiment as well as what you call business.”

A second interview! Whitmarsh wasted no time, and this must mean a deal. Sixty thousand dollars, and doubled in three months. Storm leaned impulsively across the table.

“What is your proposition, *monsieur*, if I may ask? It sounds a trifle—er—unusual.”

“It is.” The Frenchman smiled again.

" You will understand, M. Storm, that in France it is not the custom to develop a manufacturing concern until it grows too big for us and then sell out to a corporation. With us the business descends from generation to generation, it becomes at once the idol and life of the family.

" My father-in-law, Henri Peronneau, of Lille, has a soap factory established by his grandfather. Twenty years ago, a dishonest chemist in his employ stole the formula which rendered the Peronneau soap famous, and set up a rival factory. Both, of course, were dismantled during the German occupation.

" M. Peronneau has been granted a loan of six hundred thousand francs from the government, but it cannot be obtained for three months yet; meanwhile our rival has acquired more than that sum from an English house, and if his factory is the first in operation it will steal all our old trade, and M. Peronneau, who is already ruined, will have no opportunity to recoup.

" He is in frail health from the slavery of the invasion, and his heart will be broken. Three hundred thousand francs now will enable him to compete with his rival, for his factory is in far better condition, and for that he is willing to pay the entire sum which the government will lend him.

" I admit that I have tried to obtain the amount at a sacrifice less great, but there is no time for lengthy investigation, and I have found that people even in your generous America are afraid to trust to my credentials and the sponsorship of our consul. Only a man of M. Whitmarsh's experience and caliber could comprehend that the affair is bona fide, that he takes no risk. Voyez, here is the personal letter which I have received from him."

Storm glanced over the single sheet of terse, typed sentences ending in the well-crabbed signature and returned it to the Frenchman.

" I congratulate you, *monsieur*. I know Whitmarsh's methods, and this looks as if he intended to take you up on it."

M. du Chainat flushed with pleasure.

" It is of great happiness to me," he said simply. " Almost I have despaired of my mission. At the Hotel Belterre, where I am

staying, there are so many of my compatriots here also to try to borrow that they may rehabilitate themselves, and with so little success that I, too, feared failure. But M. Whitmarsh is shrewd; he knows—what you say?—'a good thing,' and he makes no mistakes."

The conversation drifted into desultory topics and after a half-hour M. du Chainat took his leave, dragging the reluctant Millard with him. As for Storm, he sat long over his cooling coffee, and until far into the night he pondered the possibilities which this chance meeting opened before him.

The difference between sixty thousand dollars and a hundred and twenty meant the difference between luxurious living and the petty economies which would try his soul; between independence for years of travel and care-free pleasure, and the necessity of knuckling down after a brief respite to uncongenial money-grubbing. It must be all right if Whitmarsh were going into it, and his letter left no room for doubt on that score. If he, Storm, had only met the Frenchman first!

In the morning he tried to concentrate on the affairs of the trust company, but it was of no avail. The glittering opportunity aroused all his gambling instinct and seemed all the more alluring in that it was out of his reach. But was it? Perhaps Whitmarsh would fail, for some reason, to accept the proposition; not from lack of faith in its genuineness, for he must have looked into it with his usual caution before going so far in the negotiations, but he had been known to turn down deals of much greater magnitude through sheer eccentricity.

If Du Chainat could offer *bona fide* securities, and he himself could obtain a mortgage of ten thousand on the Greenlea house he could add that to his capital and take the plunge.

At noon, Storm telephoned to the Belterre and asked for M. du Chainat.

" This is Storm talking, Millard's friend," he answered. " I called up, *monsieur*, to tell you that if by any chance the Whitmarsh deal falls through I might consider your proposition myself. Yes, call me at my rooms, 0519 Riverside, at six. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver slowly. Suppose, after all, the man should be an impostor? He would be risking all he had in the world in the event that Whitmarsh did not take the proposition; all that stood between him and the accursed treadmill of existence here within reach of the memories which thrust out their tentacles to crush him. If that Lille soap factory were a myth—

He reached for the receiver once more and called the French consulate. Yes, M. Henri Peronneau, of Lille, was well known

to them. His son-in-law, M. Maurice du Chainat, was now in this country negotiating a loan to reconstruct the Peronneau factory. If Mr. Storm were sufficiently interested, a meeting could without difficulty be arranged.

Storm turned away from the booth with sparkling eyes. If Whitmarsh refused the loan he would take a chance. Luck must be with him still; that marvelous luck which had enabled him to elude the consequences of his crime was yet running strong. At six o'clock he would know.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Environment

by William Holloway

IS man really civilized? Or is his apparent civilization but an artificial cloak that hides the primitive savage underneath, and which, in time of stress, he flings aside?

Dillon Weston, who had soulful blue eyes, and hair of the exact shade of gold which most women rave over, always answered the first question with a positive affirmative. These declarations were generally made while sipping tea amid a group of feminine admirers of all ages from débutantes to bachelor girls, and were invariably received with rapturous applause. There is nothing the average woman likes better than to be assured of her absolute divorce from the primitive.

And then fate shuffled the cards of life anew and rang in on Dillon Weston what

can only be described as a cold deck of the very coldest kind. The Eastern College, in which he held an assistant professorship of geology organized an expedition to make certain scientific investigations in the northern section of the Hudson Bay region. He was chosen to play an important part in the work, which included a study of glacial action in the north in those far-off days when Labrador and the New England States groaned under the weight of an ice-cap more than a mile high, and to his credit be it said that he performed his duties well enough to melt the stony heart of fate had that organ been susceptible to emotion.

But fate was ready, just then, to deal from the aforesaid cold deck. Exactly ten days before the expedition was scheduled

to sail for home, Dillon Weston received his new hand.

They were examining the northwestern slopes of Hudson Bay, in that far region where the northern section of the Barren Grounds begins to stretch an arm, through unbroken desolation, across the Northwest Passage to the Pole. Trees, even the stunted willows that cling to lowlands, had vanished some distance farther south, and the tundra, the gray-brown of its rocky surface flecked with light-green lichens and the faded remnants of red and blue summer flowers, stretched forbiddingly before them. Everywhere was evidence of glacial action in the denuded slopes of hills and in the chiseled scorings of rocks.

During the preliminary examination the members of the expedition were accustomed to scatter in order to obtain a general outline of their surroundings as speedily as possible. So it came about one morning that Dillon Weston found himself alone at the half-concealed entrance of a cave, where the strata he had been observing were more than usually interesting.

He was in the presence of an appalling ancient catastrophe. At some time in the far past a folding of the hills that could only be described as tremendous had taken place. Mighty mountain masses seemed actually to have buckled together, and in the throes of settling down to have flung huge masses of stone about like feathers. This had evidently occurred at the end of the Glacial Period, for parts of the upheaved strata bore no trace of the action of ice.

Within the cave his powerful electric flash-light showed a wide, lofty chamber, winding indefinitely into the semi-darkness, and displaying on its rocky sides some unusual geological "faults." He took a few steps toward the rear; then a few more; presently, growing interested in his work, he found himself descending the sandy floor of a wide cavern, which ran steadily but gently downward, and which was dimly lit as he afterwards discovered, through crevices high up on the mountainside.

The temperature was below freezing,

which was only to be expected in a cavern in that region of the world, but it was so far below freezing as to cause him to resume his heavy gloves rather hastily. From the walls his flash-light struck vivid gleams from crystalline schists. He was some yards below the surface and an eighth of a mile from the entrance when the cavern ended in a solid wall of ice, the remnant, evidently, of an ancient glacier!

There could not be the slightest doubt about it. Caught and imprisoned between folds of the rocks, weighed down by millions of tons of dead weight, the ice had been preserved in that Arctic climate until his coming, and would doubtless last while the world stood.

It was all a fascinating spectacle for a geologist, yet Dillon Weston paid it scant attention. For there, plainly visible in the encircling ice, natural as they had been in that far-off day when they had fallen to their death upon the glacier, were the bodies of two gigantic, maned and shaggy elephants, which he knew to be not elephants but mammoths.

For a moment he was too dazed to do more than gaze at the extraordinary spectacle. The bones of the mammoth, the enormous prehistoric ancestor of the modern elephant, are to be found in almost every great museum. The dullest schoolboy would recognize those mighty curved tusks, which could toss a present-day cow as easily as the cow takes vengeance on a troublesome dog. But the mammoth himself, in all the glory of his flesh and blood, has been found once only by man; in 1903, in the frozen soil of Siberia. And here was he, Dillon Weston, gazing at two absolutely perfect specimens, through a thin wall of ice!

For a moment his breath came in gasps and his face paled. He had won one of the greatest prizes in his chosen profession. Presently, he knew, his name would run like wildfire around the world, and he would become famous beyond the average scientist's wildest dream. Which means, though Dillon Weston did not realize it, that if you canvassed a crowded meeting in Madison Square Garden you would find at least two men who could recall his name.

He enjoyed the little walk back to his chief, more than any other walk he had ever taken. And then fate, judging the moment propitious, dealt him a hand, right from the bottom of the pack, that made him gasp.

The work of removing the mammoths from the cave involved the widening of it at certain places and the installing of powerful hoisting apparatus. It would probably require two months at least, working in shifts—and navigation was even then closing!

"You'll have to stay all winter, Dillon, to see that nobody—none of those Eskimos, I mean—destroy your find," declared Professor Smithers, the head of the expedition, with an air from which there was no appeal. "It's by long odds the biggest thing the old college has ever done, and we can't afford to take chances. We'll build you a cozy cabin and leave you plenty of coal for your stove, and I'll have the carpenter double sash your windows. And as soon as the ice goes out of Hudson Bay next spring, we'll be back." He thought an instant. "The men have all shipped for the voyage, so I can't leave one of them, and the rest of us are all married. So I suppose you'll have to make out alone. Don't mind that, do you?"

"Not the least bit in the world," lied Weston cheerfully. "I've always thought it must be pleasant to try a bit of primitive life."

"Don't try too much of it, Dillon," advised Professor Smithers with ponderous jocularity. Then he smiled. Assistant Professor Weston, with his soulful blue eyes, his clerical father and grandfather, and his eminently decorous outlook upon life, was not apt to become very primitive. And Dillon Weston smiled in return; not in the least, because he felt like smiling, but because it was so eminently the proper, decorous thing to do, considering that the head of the expedition was making the joke.

And then the vessel containing his colleagues steamed away and he was left alone in a comfortable cabin with a good stove and enough coal to last two winters if necessary. He had also a very satisfac-

tory supply of provisions and an excellent working library. On a shelf above the stove he ranged the portraits of his father, mother, and grandfather, the two men in clerical garb, his mother wearing the black silk he associated with meetings of the Dorcas Society, while on the wall he tacked up a program of geological investigation to be pursued before winter settled down in earnest.

The first night loneliness bit deep. Then, too, he had trouble with the hanging lamp which swung from the roof-tree. When it had been put in order, and he had washed his blackened hands, he looked out upon the vastness of the starry night, listened to the wind amid the boulders, and realized, for the first time, the desolation that lay about him.

He was alone in a gameless wilderness, which had lain empty and sullen beneath the sky since the dawn of time. That he could ever make friends with the monster seemed preposterous. But, whatever happened, he must not allow it to master him; that meant despair, madness, death, the commonplace trio of Arctic winters.

September was a very pleasant month. Frost was comparatively light, and the snow confined to one or two scanty falls, so that he was enabled to do some valuable work in his special department. The long walks across the tundra gave him a tremendous appetite and began to broaden his shoulders and put muscle everywhere upon his tall body.

In October snow interfered with his geological work, but not in the least with his outings. He began to go about on snow-shoes and, in order to save the battery supply of the powerful electric flash-lights—specially constructed for the expedition—of which he had several, he installed in the cave a complete lantern service with a plentiful reserve of oil. For, of course, it goes without saying that he visited the cave each day to gloat over his wonderful discovery.

There was something fascinating about these daily visits. The gigantic forms of the slain mammoths—killed, evidently, by a fall from a cliff while fighting, and buried in the slowly forming glacier—awed him

by their very vastness. They had been subjected to immense pressure, as was evidenced by the clearness of the ice, and in the remote past had probably traveled many miles from the scene of their fatal quarrel ere the mountains had imprisoned their section of the glacier forever.

Their huge tusks were fortunately uninjured, so that he was able to admire their tremendous sweep at his leisure. Those of one of the animals were bloodstained, evidently from clotted blood which soiled the other's shaggy mane, mute evidence of the ancient battle. So much, the perfect outline of the massive bodies and tusks, was plainly visible; but even the powerful flash-light was unable to bring out the details of the picture. It was as though these monsters of the prehistoric world were still shrouded in the gloom of unnumbered centuries.

With the coming of November the cold grew more intense and the grip of winter was unrelaxing. The days were growing very short now, so that most of his time was spent indoors, where he busied himself with the writing of articles for scientific magazines and with a serious attempt at a book.

The wilderness now began to exercise insensibly upon him that dangerous charm, which to so many lonely men has spelled madness. The stars blazed with strange brilliance until the aurora dimmed them with its vivid coloring, when Weston spent hours watching the play of the mystic lights. Then there were the unaccountable optical illusions of the north: the apparent movement of rocks that he knew to be solid as the rock of Gibraltar, and which presently, he knew, would settle into their places again; the stars that seemed to fall with a hissing noise into the frozen mass of Hudson Bay, the animation which, at times, appeared to possess the most fixed objects of the landscape, causing them to circle about the cabin with a movement full of threatening meaning.

In this time of stress it was the practical, undoubted fact of his discovery that held him to the line of safety. Each day he paid a visit to the cavern, and each day came away with a firmer resolve that the

world should not be deprived of these strange treasures even if he had to spend two winters in the north instead of one. And then, one morning in February, when he least expected it, the door of his cabin was opened from without as he sat writing, and a tall, fur-clad figure, followed by a shorter, very broad-shouldered one, appeared upon the threshold.

"Well, I'm damned!" cried the taller of the two, with a quick stare about him. "Double-sashed windows! Some joint, this!"

Dillon Weston welcomed them with a puzzled air. The nearest white men, as he well knew, were hundreds of miles to the south. Yet here were two calling on him in the most casual manner in the world. "Come in and shut the door," he said hospitably.

The shorter of the two, a dark man, with a black, ice-crusted beard, closed the door and came forward to the stove, where he stood combing the ice from his beard with mitten fingers.

"You probably heard of me before," he began. "I'm Sam Powers, the fur-trader, that owns the schooner Lucy. And this is my first cousin, Pete Ryan, who sails the Lucy for me."

The tall man, Ryan, who had now uncovered a hard-bitten, blond face, marred by an ugly scar diagonally across its right side, nodded confirmation.

"The Indians know us from the Little Whale River on the Labrador side, down through James Bay and round to the Nelson. We have the best outlaw trade in the bay. But now—" he shrugged his shoulders expressively—"oh, hell!"

"Stayed too late for once," Powers explained. "Got caught in a storm, driven over to this side, and frozen in about thirty miles to the south."

The eminently proper professor of geology, who was listening with eager interest, formed a striking contrast to his rough and ready visitors. Owing to the heat of the room he had pushed back the capote of the single-piece fur garment that enveloped him from head to foot. The capote made a strange, pendulous excrescence across his broad shoulders, above

which his neatly brushed hair gleamed like the yellow nimbus of some misaled saint.

"Crew still on board?" Weston asked quickly.

"Three men and the grub-slinger," answered Powers. "I filled in as mate and took one watch, and Ryan here the other. She's pretty small, you see, and it's a business where too many cooks spoil the broth."

Into Weston's mind, as he listened, came some stray scraps of information regarding the Lucy and her unsavory reputation. When the Indians go into the bush in the fall to set their traps they take with them a winter's provisions for their family, to be paid to the Hudson Bay Company in the spring in the shape of furs. The business of the Lucy it was to anchor in a convenient harbor and buy from the Indian hunter for cash or provisions the very furs he owed to the great company. It was an unpleasant business, based on the red man's broken pledges, and as such properly looked down upon.

Ryan, meanwhile, was gazing about him at the large microscope which stood upon the table, beside a portable typewriter and a pile of books; at the little slabs of roughly polished rocks, mounted upon tiny, wooden bases and ranged upon a shelf; at the pasteboard drawings of strange strata that lined the walls. "Some joint!" he said emphatically.

Weston smiled as he began to prepare his midday meal. Now that the surprise was passing away, he was conscious of a feeling of profound content at once more hearing the sound of a human voice. What he was not conscious of was the sharp glances which the newcomers fastened upon his store-closet when his back was turned, and the curious gleams of satisfaction that appeared in their keen eyes.

Half an hour later, as they sat over mugs of almost boiling tea, Powers hinted the real object of their visit. On the table was a tin of snow water, which Weston had melted that morning, but which, at a distance of ten feet from the red-hot stove, was slowly turning into a solid block of ice. The fur-trader tapped it roughly with his knife. "Rotten climate to be living in, isn't it?"

Weston nodded. "I had seventy below for three days straight last week," he remarked. "I had lots of coal, and I kept the stove blazing to the limit all day and all night, but things froze as soon as I took them off the fire."

"Got lots of grub, too, haven't you?" asked Powers.

Weston shook his head. "I took more than I thought to need by a good deal, but, looking it over yesterday, I found enough until June, and maybe a little over. I suppose I have about eight hundred pounds; that's all."

"On the Lucy," said Powers curtly, "we haven't any at all."

Weston laid down his fork. "Haven't any?" he cried. "Do you mean—"

"Mean!" interrupted the fur-trader roughly. "I mean we are starving. Do you get that? Starving!"

"Oh!" cried Dillon Weston, greatly shocked. "That's terrible!"

He was silent an instant, his blue eyes clouded. The thought of starvation in that iron wilderness was too awful for words. And the worst of it all was that he could not help.

"What are you going to do?" he stammered.

The black eyes of the fur-trader, which in their day had looked over many a tricky bit of fur, now bored into Weston's face as though in search of a hidden weakness he knew must be there.

"It's what you are going to do that counts, isn't it? I'm waiting on you."

"I'll give you what I can spare," cried Dillon Weston hastily. "But that isn't much." He thought an instant, estimating how he could curtail his daily allowance in order to help, and realizing the hopeless inadequacy of his assistance. "I'll give every ounce I can spare," he added, turning toward the store-closet.

"Spare!" broke in Ryan with a laugh. "Spare! Hear him say it! Hell!"

"There are six of us on the Lucy," snarled the fur-trader. "Do you think we want any of your damned charity? You haven't been long in the north, stranger, or you'd talk different. Up here it's man to man, and no favors, and the weak go to

the wall. D'y'e get that? The weak go to the wall." He turned to his friend and barked a command. "Watch that side, Pete!"

Ten minutes later the host of the small dinner-party awoke from what seemed ages of slumber. There was a lump on his head where he had fallen on the edge of his bunk, and a generally bruised feeling throughout his body. From a cut on his forehead a tiny stream of blood ran saltly into his mouth. His visitors were engaged in making two huge packs of the choicest of his provisions.

"Why, look who's here!" cried the fur-trader pleasantly. "Hanged if our little friend ain't woke up to say 'good-by.' I call that a classy, high-brow thing to do."

Dillon Weston lifted his aching head and stared earnestly at the speaker. "Where are you going with my stuff?" he asked hoarsely.

"Ain't teaching grammar in the college you was telling us about," remarked Ryan plaintively. "Else you'd say 'going with your stuff,' seeing that this chow has changed hands."

"As to our sailing directions," remarked Powers, "you can be sure we're not heading for the Lucy. There isn't enough chow for all, so we'd only be waiting round, watching each other die. We're going to make a sled out of some of your gear and then beat it down south on snow-shoes about seven hundred miles to an Indian camp we know."

He bent over to his work, then suddenly straightened up at the crunching sound of snow-shoes on the frozen snow without. His face had grown pallid. "God! Petey! It's the boys!" he whispered.

Ryan sprang toward the door, hesitated and turned backward as it was flung open in his face and four fur-clad figures hurled themselves helter-skelter into the room, a huge, red-bearded fellow, with a yellow, woolen scarf about his neck, in the van.

Not a word was exchanged. Silently, with a savage malignity that was all the more impressive from its entire absence of speech, the newcomers leaped upon the owner and captain of the Lucy. And, as silently, the others fought back.

Looking on, Weston could see a blur of surging forms, that swept across the overturned table and battled savagely, ferociously up and down the interior of the cabin. The large microscope, with which he did so much of his work, was flung on the floor beside his shattered typewriter; the shelf of mounted specimens was torn from its place and his trophies hurled helter-skelter on the floor; and still the fight raged on, as though some savage animals had been struggling for supremacy in the heart of the jungle.

Presently, however, there came a lull. Powers and Ryan, bleeding from a dozen cuts, stood together beneath the window, one grasping the broken leg of the table, the other swinging aloft the arm of a shattered chair, while facing them were their assailants, leaning forward ready to spring.

"Suppose we talk this thing over, boys?" said Powers, and even in the midst of his losing battle Weston noted the ring of courage in the man's voice. Whatever else he might be the fur-trader was evidently no coward. "I got something to say. If 'twasn't for me you fellers wouldn't be here at all."

"Ah, hell!" said the red-bearded sailor shortly. "We know you met some Eskimos that was going south because the walrus had quit on them, and they told about the collide feller being here. That's all right. And then you up and says th' on'y thing to do is to come up here and git grub. All right, too. But what ain't all right is fer you and Pete to beat it up here alone and grab it fer yourselves."

"It's this way, boys," went on Powers earnestly. "I figured the young feller wouldn't have enough for the bunch, so I put it up to Petey that him and me would get chow enough to last us down the coast till we struck White Bear's tribe. You remember White Bear that give us those black-fox skins last summer? Well, I cal'ate we could git grub and dogs there and come up for you, whilst if we all tried to make it we'd die in our tracks. That's the truth, s'elp me!"

"Truth! Hell!" cried the red-bearded one. "I see ye going, but not a coming back."

"Aw, shucks!" cried Powers indifferent-ly. Weston, watching, could see him wetting his dry lip with his tongue as he played his last card. "Wouldn't we have to come back before the ice took the Lucy out in the spring? Say, wouldn't we?"

"That's gospel truth, Jack," one of the newcomers cried; and Weston could see that the trader had made an impression. "It sounds good to me," declared a second.

"What I say is this," Ryan broke in. "Let's cut out all this funny business and draw lots who's to go south. Two has got to go. Sam and me 'll stand aside and let you boys choose among yerselves if ye want it that way. Then the rest stays here till help comes."

"Some shack!" cried one of the four, looking about him. "It listens good, Jack," added another. "Anyway we've got Sam where we want him," said a third.

The red-bearded giant nodded agreement. "All right, Sam," he said gruffly. "Chuck down your club; and cooky, you get busy and let's have the best you got. Rustle some bacon first thing!"

"Righto," was the answer of the dirtiest and most villainous of the four as he stepped forward. "Got th' best uv everything, boys," was his awed remark, as he surveyed the packs which Powers and Ryan had shoved in the corner at the approach of danger. "Some chow, believe me!"

As Dillon Weston stood beside the stove the whole affair seemed both real and unreal, like one of those strange dreams in which the dreamer appears to awaken even while the dream runs on. The sunlight streaming through the window threw the interior of the cabin and its occupants into relief, with the clearness of a stereopticon. Surely this could not be the peaceful room in which two hours before he had been writing up his journal? The thing was incredible. In a sudden gust of anger he stepped forward.

"Where do I come in?" he demanded.

"Nowheres," answered the red-bearded man sharply. "And if ye give any talk"—he lifted a huge fist—"I'll show ye what o'clock it is." He laughed quietly. "Ye don't come in anywheres; we ain't got

enough to go round as 'tis." He turned to the others. "What 'll we do with him, boys?"

Dillon Weston, to do him justice, was no coward. When the fur-trader and his ally had attacked him he had been too dazed to do more than gaze at the astounding spectacle of their treachery. Now he had recovered his self-possession; moreover, he was angry in a cold-blooded way that made him dangerous; he struck him of the red beard a blow that echoed through the room.

Dillon Weston was a man of unusual physical strength; in addition, he had, as gymnasium work, taken lessons in boxing not many years before; so that the contest should have been fairly equal. But fighting, as practised in the rough corners of the world, is a very different thing from what the prize-ring knows as fighting, as John Morrissey once had the misfortune to prove.

As a boxer, red-beard would probably have made a wise audience laugh itself to death; as a rough and tumble fighter in a cabin in the Arctic, he proceeded to prove in a class by himself. As Weston, bleeding and defeated, lay upon the floor of the cabin, he felt an odd feeling of admiration for the man who had beaten him; an unwilling tribute to an enemy, but still a tribute.

"Game enough!" was red-beard's verdict as he stanch'd his bleeding face. "Question is, what to do with th' fool. There's not enough grub to go round. I say croak him."

"An have the college people come back next summer and raise the whole country up!" protested Powers. "I'm fer giving him a mite of grub and turning him out doors. Say he dies; somebody's got to die afore spring; maybe more than one," he ended darkly.

"And if he dies, it's only starvation," cried another. "We can say he got dippy and wandered away; lots gets batty up here, everybody knows that."

So it came about half an hour later that Dillon Weston went into exile from the cabin in which he had fought his losing fight; went into exile with his furs and

clothes, some cooking utensils, a small bag of flour, a few beans, and some pilot biscuit. He had plenty of tea, an article which the sailors despised, but not a trace of meat or fat. One of the men had proposed allowing him a tin of lard, but the suggestion had been frowned upon, lard being recognized as too great a delicacy to be lightly parted with.

That night he sat in the shelter of the cave, thinking over his misfortunes. Above him, suspended from a jutting rock, was the lantern he had kept in the cave to save his flashlight; in a hollow below him was a small stove, originally intended for the cabin, but discarded as too small, which the rascals had allowed him to take; in a pile beside him was a supply of coal, which he intended to increase next day, an agreement having been reached by which the overabundant store of fuel should be divided in equal shares. The lantern swung fitfully in the gusts that drove in from the desolate tundra, and the stove smoked.

That afternoon he had found a crevice in the rock that apparently led through a tiny hole to the outside world, for watching closely, it was possible to detect a faint glow of daylight. With a little work he would be able to make an excellent chimney of it. Meantime, his stovepipe was not long enough to reach into the crevice, and the stove smoked persistently.

These, however, were minor discomforts. What mattered really was the unpleasant fact that he was now face to face with starvation as it is known in the north.

In that wide, desolate land he was quite alone. No animal life existed on the frozen wastes of the tundra; no bird crossed the gray sky; not even a walrus lifted a tusk in that awful stillness. Wherever he looked a white death seemed to wait mockingly, both for himself and the men of the Lucy. Left to himself he would have passed safely through the winter; the advent even of one more would have spelled disaster; while the intrusion of the six meant a quick death for all concerned.

Had the fur-trader and his companion escaped southward with the bulk of the provisions, it was barely possible that they two might have won to safety; that they

would have been able to bring back aid, even had they been so minded, he did not in the least believe; as the situation now presented itself there was nothing to look forward to but death by starvation.

The provisions he had lost would not keep the crew of the Lucy alive much more than a month at most; after that—Dillon Weston shrugged his shoulders with supreme indifference. He would not be there to see; so what matter?

Next morning he awoke at daylight and began the tiresome task of removing the rest of his coal supply to the cave. Powers, who stood beside the cabin, watched him carelessly as though he had other things to think of; from the interior of the cabin came the sound of loud voices, that of the red-bearded man more strident than the rest; evidently the inmates were not quite satisfied with the situation.

Later in the day, when he had packed the remainder of his coal to the cave, he set to work to make the place more habitable. The entrance was fairly narrow. Now he built a snow rampart in front of it, with a tortuous winding passage, leading by a narrow doorway into the cave itself. The twistings in the passage would break the force of the wind and help to make the cavern warmer.

With snow and water he fashioned a long tube that acted as an excellent continuation of his stove pipe and did away with the smoking that had annoyed him. And, having thus put his house in order, Dillon Weston sat down to wait for death.

He did not blink the fact. It was something to be faced. Neither did he blame the men of the Lucy. After all, life was a struggle in which the weak went to the wall. All right! He could do it without useless whining! And as a preliminary he decided not to go near the cabin, no matter what happened. If he had to die he would die by himself, as the old cavemen crawled off to their dens, when their time came.

A couple of weeks passed, and, despite the strict limits he imposed upon himself, his supplies were practically at an end. Hunger was gnawing at him as in violation of his resolve, he walked slowly across the tundra toward the cabin.

Suppose it were possible to regain possession of his stores? The idea startled him; then he put it aside as absurd; one man does not overcome six except by a miracle. From the cabin, as he approached, came a faint, far-away odor of frying bacon, infinitely enticing. His body was trembling, as he walked away, with the effort it had cost him not to abandon his last shred of self-respect and beg its inmates for food.

To change the current of his thoughts he returned to the cave, and, taking up the lantern, went into the recesses of the cavern to gloat over the huge bulk of the mammoths, which he hoped would become known to posterity as the "Dillon Weston Discovery." So much had happened since the arrival of the fur-trader that he had not once visited his prize. Now, as he stood before the strange monsters, coeval, as he knew, with primitive man, he became slowly conscious of a change.

The gigantic, shaggy-maned animals were no different from what they had been when his startled eyes first fell upon them: wonderful, scientific treasures at which the scholastic world would wonder.

The change was in himself. His sense of values was different. The bitter arctic waste, the barren tundra upon which wind blew the snow in huge drifts that were full of strange runic lines, the long nights when the walls of the cabin cracked from frost with the report of a rifle, the slow starvation which was weakening him each day—all had combined to give him a newer, more primitive view-point.

Far off in the old life he had left so long behind, the mammoths had a scientific and educational value. Now, as he stood in front of them, he was conscious of them only as a cave-man would have been—as food! For the animals, killed by their fall upon the ice, and buried under snow and ice in the unbelievable cold of the Glacial Age, represented thousands upon thousands of pounds of fresh meat! And the man, muffled in furs to the eyebrows, who gloated over the sight, could have told you that meat was more than raiment, and a good deal more than all the colleges in the world.

He was staggering from weakness as he returned to his quarters for an ax. The fore-shoulder of one of the animals was within a few inches of the surface. A few minutes' labor freed it from ice, after which came the difficult work of cutting through the tough hide to the frozen flesh beneath; nearly half an hour's exertion was required before a huge piece of meat, dark as that of the walrus, lay in his hands. Two hours later, Dillon Weston could have told you that mammoth steak was the finest eating in the world, and, what is more, he would have believed it.

Two weeks went by in storm and tempest. Snow drifted into the pathway to the cave until it was entirely covered, and he was compelled to keep the lantern burning continuously, until he hit upon the expedient of making candles out of the tallow of the mammoth meat.

Thereafter he reserved the lantern for his visits to the far end of the cave, and did his cooking by the light of a pair of the strangest candles in use since time began. Then the storm ceased, and he dug his way out of the cave to the light of a perfect winter day.

But for his snow-glasses the glare from the white surface of the tundra would have been blinding. Far and wide endless slopes of dazzling snow reflected the light from a myriad crystals; the frozen surface beneath him creaked under his snow-shoes; as he walked toward the cabin he was conscious, more than ever in his life, of the joy of living.

A silence brooded over his old home, that was not dispelled as he drew near. Pushing open the door, he found the owner and crew of the Lucy huddled around the fire. Evidently they had been unable to spare food to send two men south. Powers looked up, stared in surprise as though he had seen a ghost, swore softly under his breath, and was silent. The red-bearded sailor, who sat on the edge of Weston's bunk, spat savagely upon the stove as he growled an oath; but no one offered a remark.

"I've finished all that stuff I took away," Weston began. "Can you let me have a little more?"

"More? Hell!" exclaimed red-beard. "There's one pilot biscuit left. And we're going to draw lots fer that."

"I say divide it," said Ryan huskily. "Then every man 'll git a taste."

"Ah, what's a taste?" scoffed Powers. "Let's draw. Then the one as wins gets a couple of real mouthfuls before he cashes in."

There was a little murmur of assent, and red-beard began assorting several slivers of wood. Weston stepped forward. "I'm in on this," he said sharply. "It was my biscuit in the first place."

Red-beard looked at him out of inscrutable eyes. "I told the boys you were a game bird," he said slowly. "Now you're showing it." He stroked his flaming beard with a monstrous hand. "When a man has a chance to live," he went on, "he sometimes has ter be hard; but when he's going ter cash in—hell! What's th' use. I'm willin' ef th' boys is."

"All right!" barked Powers, and the rest nodded assent. "Give the guy a chanct fer a last bite!" advised the cook. And the drawing began.

A minute later red-beard handed to Dillon Weston the prize he had won. Then he leaned back against the bunk and spat upon the stove. "Ye won it fair, young feller," said he briefly. "Now git t'ell with it."

As Weston walked rapidly homeward, the pilot biscuit in his hand, he recalled the scene in the cabin. Not a hand had been raised to stay his departure, though he had noticed more than one pair of shoulders quiver. Rough, hardened as the men were, they had stood true to their code—which is all that can be said of any man.

Two hours later he staggered into the

cabin again, and flung a heavy burden on the table. And that night six men beyond the pale of law, and one erstwhile decorus member of a college faculty, ate fresh meat in a cabin where a red-hot stove was unable to keep water liquid five feet away, and found the room too warm; while the arctic atmosphere vibrated with the melancholy roaring of ancient chanteys. And in this manner did the wilderness take Dillon Weston to itself.

Even the complete loss of the mammoths did not upset him. Two tons of meat and fat had been removed and stored in the cave when the ice split asunder and the animals vanished beneath a projecting ledge, taking with them a funeral mound of thousands of tons of ice. But there was food enough to keep the little group from starving. And that, and not curio seeking, was the essential thing, as Weston could have told you.

Professor Smithers, on his return in June, accepted the disappointment with scientific self-possession. "You're looking well, Dillon," he remarked pleasantly. "And I hope you didn't get too near the primitive when I was away."

Thinking of the six rascals, gone three weeks before, for whom he would always have a warm spot in his heart, Dillon Weston shook his head. He had, of course, no intention of mentioning his visitors. "Maybe I'm not of primitive type."

Professor Smithers looked down at his own neat rubbers. "Of course not, Dillon. You and I have left the primitive stage of evolution thousands of years behind. We could not possibly return to it."

Dillon Weston gazed across the gray-green surface of the tundra and smiled an inscrutable smile.



LOVELY CHILD

BY HARRY KEMP

LOVELY child, make haste to play
While the dew is on your day—
Half a score of years ahead
You will labor for your bread.

The Ivory Pipe

by J.U.Giesy and Junius B. Smith

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE TIME APPROACHES."

BRYCE lighted a cigar. "That woman's got all the moral qualities of a high-class vamp," he remarked as we spun away down the drive. "Considerin' her friends, I bet there was some strong stuff pulled at those entertainments of hers."

"And yet," I said, recalling the faces of more than one of the attendants at the Mallory service the day before, "she appears to be well received."

"By society, you mean?"

I nodded.

Jim grunted. "Th' only difference between what I said, an' a certain class of society, m' son, is that one hasn't been found out, an' th' other has."

"Well," I changed the topic of conversation, "we appear to have drawn another blank, no matter what the lady's standing is."

Bryce removed his cigar and blew a cloud of smoke. "Hell, yes," he agreed without any special emotion. "But we been doin' that for days. We go back now and tell Dual we've drawn it, I suppose?"

I agreed by another nod. There really seemed nothing else to do. This was the fourth day we had been at work, and thus far we had little enough to show. Semi-Dual, and Semi-Dual alone, as it seemed to me, had been able, up to now,

to gain any really definite conception of the matter. His positive statement that in his opinion the murder of Peaches had been something unintended; his warning against the attempt on Gladys's life, however, would surely seem to indicate that he had at least a theoretical knowledge of some of the hidden moves that were taking place. Anyway he had told us to see Mrs. Lee and that was as good as a definite order to report. All things considered, it seemed best to visit next, one possessed of his peculiar ability to learn the truth by reading the stars themselves, before seeking to establish it by facts.

But though I assented and we left the cab in front of the Urania doors, we were destined to meet an interruption to our purpose at least, for Edwards was waiting in front of the building.

"Been waiting for you," he began as I turned from paying the driver. "I don't know if it's important or not, but Gregson drove up in a tearing hurry and went into Palls's office just about an hour after you left. I went up to your place but they told me you were out so I came down here to slip you the information, and now I'm off to the jail, I guess."

"All right. Much obliged old chap," I accepted. "Of course, Palls may have called him over or not, but the thing's of interest at least. I told Miss Vance you were coming over, so you better keep my word."

He hurried off and I glanced at Jim. He shook his head. Like myself I suppose he was wondering just then whether Gregson's visit to the broker had anything to do with our call about the card. He made no audible comment, however, and we entered the ingoing stream of traffic to catch an upgoing cage.

One might have sensed that Dual had been doing some of that reading I had thought of, as we entered the room where he was sitting at his desk. It was covered by a mass of papers bearing circle and symbol and sign, the characters of astrological figures I had come to know so well as the sign manuals of his work.

He motioned us to chairs.

"You come at a good time, my friends," he greeted. "I trust you have seen the woman of the sables and the exceedingly light blond hair."

"Blond hair," said Jim, sitting down. "Oh, yes, we've seen her. She's some jane. When you get right up against her, that hair of hers makes you think of a Circassian side-show freak. I wouldn't have been surprised to see her reach into a basket and pull out a snake."

"A charmer may not always confine her ability to reptiles," Semi-Dual made answer. "But I have reasons of my own at this time for hearing without delay what your efforts may have produced."

I told him. When he spoke like that, as I very well knew, there was no time for discussion. And even as I sank down into my accustomed chair at the end of the desk, I felt that surely in my absence he had been reading—learning things I knew not of, yet hinted at by the urge in his words and manner, things veiled to the comprehension of all save one, who like himself could interpret those strange charts of astral meaning before him, on which as we entered he had been engaged.

I told him all the story of the day, of our visit to Palls, of our call on Gladys Vance, of our interview with the eccentric Mrs. Lee in the Wyndham house, our recent meeting with Edwards.

And as before, I found a tiny spark shining in the depths of the gray eyes he unveiled when I had closed.

"Your information fits in admirably with my own investigations," he said. "Little by little the veil is being torn asunder—things tend to grow clear at last."

"Well, my Lord!" Jim said; "I'm glad to hear it even if I can't see it myself. Up to now there ain't a thing been clear to me except that this jane knew Mallory and Gregson and Palls, an' that them two, no matter what they say, are somehow mixed up in this case. Palls made a pretty good bluff when we saw him this mornin' I'll admit, but—it wasn't quite good enough."

Dual turned toward him as he answered: "In telling you what he did this morning, Mr. Bryce, it is my opinion that Mr. Palls told you absolutely the truth."

"What!" Bryce sat up sharply. His voice rose in the involuntary accents of amazed surprise. For a moment he sat staring back at Dual in a fashion almost unconsciously antagonistic. Then he recovered himself in a measure. "How do you make that out?" he asked.

"By means of my computations." Dual gestured slightly to the mass of papers before him. "You yourself obtained the recorded birthdates of the two men, Palls and Gregson, for me, if you remember. From the figures I have erected upon those dates as a basis, I am led to the positive belief that neither man had more than an incidental connection, either with the death of Noriene Mallory or the attempt on Miss Vance's life."

He spoke clearly, calmly, as one might state a wholly abstruse fact. Conviction, a definite, positive quality of absolute belief inspired his voice. And after that for a time silence came down in the room save that as Semi-Dual paused, Jim took a single rasping breath expressive more of complete futility I think than of anything else.

I couldn't blame him either, considering what had just been said. If Gregson and Palls were innocent of guilty knowledge, I couldn't really see just where Semi's pronouncement of the fact left us myself. And now—now when suddenly they were withdrawn from the equation as they had been, since it did not occur to me to doubt

Dual's conclusions, I found that almost without knowing, I had been rather counting upon one or both of the men in question as at least a possible means to the solution of the mystery from the first.

Indeed as it seemed to me now they had constituted the only real leading we had encountered. Besides that, things had kept coming up to support the theory that they did know something—things such as Edwards had expressed last night, when he had pointed out that Palls had known he was sending flowers to the jail, had been in a position to make use of the knowledge had he wished. Consequently upon me as well as on Jim, Semi's positive assertion had a disconcerting effect which for the time being well nigh robbed me of the capacity for lucid speech.

"But Semi," I did manage what sounded rather like an appeal at last.

He smiled. There could be no doubt but that he understood; that he knew just how completely his words had upset us both, and the reason for it. His smile showed that understanding and his voice when it came.

"Let not anything I may have said disturb you, my friends, remembering as you must remember that up until this time those things, those facts and findings with which we have dealt, have been unavoidably obscure—that I told you in the beginning that we must work and wait together the effects brought about by the causes set into motion; that in my opinion the matter on which we have been engaged would run a cumulative course. And the course of cumulation is like that of the sand bar in the river which through the carrying to it of the particles out of which it is built, slowly enlarges and grows, each bit of which amounts to little in itself, save that it is an integral portion of the mass."

"You mean," I said, "or I hope you mean, that we have contributed in a measure to the sum total of knowledge that is beginning to make things clear, as you say, at last?"

He inclined his head. "And in no small measure either, since, though each grain of sand in the river bar, while no more

than a sand grain really, may by its position in the integral whole assume an importance entirely unsuspected. As for instance the color of the flowers sent by Mrs. Lee to grace the funeral of her friend, which, as it appears from your account of your conversation this afternoon, she was at more or less trouble to explain."

"Huh?" Suddenly, Bryce came out of the abstraction that had held him since Semi had pronounced his dictum regarding Gregson and Palls. "What about th' color? What's it got to do with sand?"

"With sand nothing," said Semi-Dual, excusing that inability of Jim's to understand the forms of symbolism he was so wont to use as his means of expression. "But there is truth now as always in the saying that 'Eyes have they and they see not; ears and they hear not,' since we who denominate ourselves men and women, are prone to permit the eyes and ears of the spirit to be blinded and numbed by the physical eyes of the mind. Yet the eyes of the spirit exist, and he who knows the means of their employment, will find that he can read. Let me ask if you have ever associated the color red with mourning, Mr. Bryce?"

"With mourning?" Jim repeated, while I experienced a sudden sensation best described by a tightening of the nerves. "Why, no. I've always associated it with something more like a celebration—Fourth of July, and Chinese New Year."

"Exactly," said Semi-Dual. "And yet red is also used largely in their burials by the Chinese."

"The Chinks!" Jim burst out in visible excitement. "That woman's got one for a butler, an' Mallory had that pipe in her rooms, an' Lee sends red roses to her funeral, an'— Say—"

"The sand bar in the river's course," said Semi-Dual, "grows with the addition of each grain of sand."

The sand-bar grows. Were the pipe, the color of the funeral flowers, the friendship between the two women, the fact that the lessee of the Wyndham house employed an Oriental servant, grains of sand? Was that what Dual meant? And was the sand-bar in the course of the river something

which should some day bar its further progress or check it at least—a something growing stronger, a more definite barrier, approaching nearer and nearer to the time when it should block the swirling force of the very current that had built it, with each added bit of evidence? Was that it?

Had Dual by his means of learning the unknowable, as it seemed at times, been as it were the initial bar to the dark course of the flood of human passions and sordid material purpose let loose by whoever was responsible for what had occurred? And had each fact, each item of knowledge Bryce and I had brought to him, been built into the fabric he had been slowly erecting for the staying of that course for days? All at once it seemed to me that this and this only could be the true interpretation of his strangely cryptic words. And if so, then too I could understand his welcoming remark that we came at a good time, his urge that I tell my story without delay.

His work had been well-nigh complete; he had only needed for its completion a few—perhaps a very few—additional “grains of sand.” Had we furnished them? I wondered. Was the barrier in the path of the guilty now complete? Had it been built up through our joint efforts? Had we, without knowing, so far as Bryce and I were concerned, succeeded?

Suddenly it seemed to me that we must at least be on the verge of success, since Semi had said all things were becoming clear at last—Semi-Dual—my inscrutable, wonderful friend—this modern mystic—so practical in his mysticism after all, who had said that we three were seekers after truth. All at once, as the thought gripped me with the force of a conviction, I lifted my head and met his watching eyes.

They were on me. I knew he had been watching me all along; that they understood what had been going on in my puzzling brain. And now they smiled back at me with perfect understanding.

“Patience,” he spoke softly, including both Jim and me in his further words. “Not yet is the time of justice, my friends. But it approacheth with the slow march of the judge when with dignity, he gathers his robes about him and takes his place.

Even now the Court of High Justice is sitting in judgment on the guilty. Cause and effect are the accusers, and the jurors are the stars. Justice shall be done at the appointed time and shall prove but a carrying out of that verdict which is theirs. But for the present let the trial proceed in good faith of the final findings, since there remains another element, as yet, to enter the case.”

And as before, he spoke with a positive conviction, with the air of one with unshaken faith in his words. I believed. Strangely enough, as I sat there and listened, all doubt of the results to be achieved died out of my heart. That calm avowal of the unswervable march of justice toward an appointed end, swept me up and seemed to carry me forward to the final time when the newer element he mentioned should have brought the matter to an ending, even though I had no least conception of what it was.

“After all then,” I said at length, “the whole matter revolves about the ivory pipe. It was the first grain of sand.”

“It was an important grain of sand because of its position,” Semi said.

“I don’t make it. I don’t make it at all,” Jim complained, breaking through the silence that had held him in a sort of morose brooding. “Whadje mean? I’ll admit it was a handsome thing. Was there somethin’ funny about it, like these temple jewels that have been swiped out of idols now and again? Is that what it was?”

“There was nothing of what you mean about the pipe, Mr. Bryce,” Dual replied. “Nor in the funeral flowers in themselves. Each is no more than a leading, an indication—a something to be read not so much by the eyes of the mind as of the soul. Yet each, as one might say, establishes in a certain measure the key note of this pitiful affair. For the pipe was the pipe of Pan, and the flowers, things of ethereal beauty in themselves, become at the last the pall that covered the limbs of a human flower, spotted by the filth of the world—of material indulgence—of what those of a satyric nature call earthly pleasure before they were laid in the grave.

“Truly, my friends, is it said that ‘The

wages of sin is death.' And as light defeats darkness ever, and good overcometh evil, so too doth the sinner, having wrought his evil doing, receive his wage. Those who live in the flesh, in the flesh and by the flesh shall they perish, even as the germ of a disease, by its very growth in the body, sets up the causes destined in the end to effect its own dissolution, dooms itself to death through the substances its own ill activities produce."

"And as near as I can make that out," said Jim, "you mean that this bunch, whenever they are, are going to hang themselves."

Semi-Dual inclined his head. "In a measure, yes. That will be true, in effect at least, since it is they who themselves have created a retroactive cause."

Jim took another deep breath. His manner was somewhat dazed. "An' I suppose accordin' to that there ain't nothin' to do but wait."

"Wait, aye," Semi-Dual told him, "until you are called upon again to work."

"Semi!" I cried, arrested by the wording of his answer. "Do you mean that—that it's nearly finished?"

"As yet, no," he replied directly. "Yet the time approaches when it will be. My exact meaning is that in my sincere belief, those further steps required to bring about its ending depend largely upon myself. Hence return now to your accustomed ways, yet hold yourself in readiness to act."

"Return?" I gasped.

"Aye, full of the grateful knowledge that more than one soul shall be again uplifted; that you have acquired fresh merit, through your work."

Dismissal. It was nothing less. I felt startled, puzzled, amazed, and hurt. I rose and Bryce followed. Or was it dismissal? Already my first shocked feeling of pique was passing. Semi had said the rest of the affair would depend largely upon himself. And—we were to return until once more we were needed. As always, Dual had stated the necessities of the issue. That was it. I felt a trifle better as we left the roof.

Not so Bryce. His face was a dull red from suppressed emotion. "Fired—kicked

out," he exploded as the chimes died away behind us and we descended the stairs. "Told to beat it and given a bone of 'acquired merit' to gnaw on. Maybe things are clear to him, but the only thing clear to me is that he don't consider us of very much use."

"Hold on, old man," I said, and pointed out what conclusions regarding the matter I had formed already for myself.

"Huh!" he grunted when I had finished. "Well, by granny! maybe you're right, m' son." His expression cleared.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NORMAN HADDON.

WE went down and entered our office for the first time that day. So far as that went, however, we were fortunate in having as our representative in our absence, a very efficient young woman who had been with us from the first—Miss Nellie Newell.

She glanced up from her desk as we came in together, and rose to intercept us.

"Mr. Glace," she announced, "there is a Mr. Haddon—a Mr. Norman Haddon—has called twice to see you this afternoon. The last time he decided to wait and I gave him a chair in your private room."

"Thank you, Miss Newell," I said. Haddon was a man I had known for some time, rather better than some people knew him, but he was the last man in the world I had expected to-day. I glanced at Bryce. His face was an unvoiced interrogation. He also was acquainted with Haddon, though not so well as myself.

"Stick around," I told him. "I'll see what he wants."

Then I entered my private room.

Mr. Norman Haddon sat there, impeccable in dress and grooming, a very fashion plate as always, debonair and smiling, in seeming a rather idle, rather bored, and blasé example of the type best described as a man about town.

"Oh, hello, old chap! Happened to be in your city and thought I'd take the opportunity, you know, of renewing old ac-

quaintance. Not disturbing you, am I, dear old fellow; what?" he said in the sort of English aped by so many of his apparent class, as I closed the door.

"Not at all," I replied, taking the languid hand he extended. To tell the truth, I liked the man despite his actually foppish ways. Or not so much in spite of them either, but because I knew that they really were a mask behind which lurked the real Haddon, as a hunter may lurk in a blind.

"Awfully good of you to say so, old dear," he remarked as our fingers touched, and I laughed in his face.

"Forget it, Haddon," I prompted. "Cut it out."

He knew well enough that I referred to his manner and he followed my suggestion with a vengeance. "Glace," he said in a wholly altered fashion, jerking his head slightly to one side, "is yours a sound-proof door?"

My interest quickened. I glanced at the entrance to the room, I had just closed behind me.

"Well," I hastened to assure him, "up to now it's never been impeached, but what's the answer?"

He smiled slightly as he responded. "As a matter of fact, my visit isn't quite so casual as it appears. What's this I hear about the arrest of Gladys Vance?"

And if he had quickened my interest a moment before, he intensified it now. What interest, I asked myself, did Norman Haddon, one of the "unknown" agents of the Federal Intelligence Service, a man who had done wonderful work for his country in the past, even while seeming to have no aim or object in life beyond his own pleasures, have in Gladys Vance?

Then as I felt his brown eyes waiting for my reply to his question, I told him: "Well, as it happens, it's the truth. It's a most peculiar case too, Haddon, and has had Bryce and me up in the air for several days. Right now things appear to have reached what one might call an *impasse*."

He nodded. "Tell me about it," he said. "The charge is murder, I believe?"

"First," I suggested, as he settled him-

self in his chair to hear my story, "let me ask what you know about the Vance girl, yourself."

"Met her in New York," he responded briefly. "Knew she was in the city. Called to see her and found her—*out*. Found out she was also *in*—jail, and that you were working in her interests in the matter. Don't believe she did anything like the details I have gathered. Always seemed a thoroughbred sort of girl to me. Wouldn't mind helping her out of a pickle if there is anything I could do. Thought I might even call on her in jail if you could fix it. Got a lovely voice, as I know myself. Pity to cage it. Now shoot."

For a moment I studied the man before I complied. Casual as was his explanation, I wondered if he were telling me the truth. He was a peculiar article, was Haddon. He had to be to have done the unheralded work he had been doing as I knew for years—to have won to his present position, where he stood high—how high even I myself was not sure—in the department confidence. But his attitude of passive waiting told me nothing. I gave it up and began.

And I guess I made my narrative pretty complete, because as I went on I found a positive relief to talk about the case.

"Rum go," he made comment as I reached an end. Actually he aped the vapid so much in his conversation that it crept more or less into his serious speech. "Honestly, you chaps seem to be pretty well up against a wall. Do you suppose now by any chance that the little lady has fallen a trifle short of telling you the truth? I don't mean that she's deceived you exactly in what she's told you, but that she simply hasn't seen fit to tell you all she knows."

As a matter of fact I had considered that side of the matter more than once, and I said so. "But in Heaven's name," I completed the admission, "what could she know?"

"Too much," Haddon said, in his at times half-humorous fashion. "Why else would they have tried to get her inside the jail, when she was already booked for the Mallory murder? That's clear enough, I should fancy. You see, they're afraid that if she comes to trial she may loosen up and

tell things they can't afford to have disclosed."

He was right, in theory at least. What he said would explain the attempt on Miss Vance's life. "That's a logical conclusion," I agreed.

And Haddon nodded. Suddenly once more he was smiling. "See here," he exclaimed. "I wonder that you haven't called in that friend of yours who reads the stars, to help you a bit in this."

I laughed. It was hard at times to tell whether Haddon was merely talking or asking a question. "As a matter of fact," I replied, "we have."

Because really it couldn't do any harm to tell him. He knew Semi-Dual, had twice met him, both times when Semi himself was engaged on the solution of a baffling tangle.

Now he echoed my laugh. "And what does he say about it?"

"As nearly as I can interpret his remarks, he says he will have to handle the rest of the matter himself," I rejoined.

"Eh?" Haddon narrowed his eyes. "What does he mean by that?"

"He didn't explain," I told him.

"No, I suppose not," said my companion in a tone of musing. "Honestly, Glace, Mr. Semi-Dual is the most wonderful man I have ever met. There is a something about him—I hardly know how to express it, but a something that makes one feel that he is just a bit wiser, a bit stronger, a bit better armed with knowledge in its true sense, don't you know, than any of the rest of us. I'm not inclined to be mawkish, and I don't intend to in the present instance, but positively one can't come long into contact with him without feeling the man's superior ability and force."

He laughed again and there was a tinge of uncertainty about the sound—an almost embarrassed something. "I—well, hang it, I always think of him as a wise man, such as one reads about. At the risk of appearing hackneyed, I might allege that he appears more of a superman than a mere human being, I suppose. And yet—he's most delightfully human. Does he still live on the roof?"

"Yes," I answered, nodding. Haddon's outburst was little short of surprising, but

I understood. I had felt the same way about Dual from the time I met him first.

He lifted his eyes toward the ceiling as though he would pierce through the intervening floors. "Sitting on the roof of a modern sky-scraper, reading the stars," he said. "Actually, Glace, that's almost as weird in its way as this case of yours."

"I know it," I agreed. "But there's a difference. I've seen Dual prove his ability by results and so far as the case is concerned, the only lead we seemed to have has flittered, and there isn't any proof."

"Of course," said Haddon, "there are a dozen different ways in which they might have picked up one of Edwards's cards."

"I suppose so," I assented without much interest.

"Palls and this Gregson are society johnnies?"

"Oh, yes," I said, "of a class."

"And the women at that funeral—they were of a certain class of 'society'—I'm using quotes for 'society,' Glace, please notice—too."

"Quite so," I confessed. "Probably you appreciate the class without further amplification."

Haddon nodded. "I fancy I do. This Gregson is a pretty speedy johnnie, I take it, and Palls the sort of old-young bounder we've both seen before?"

"Yes," I said, "that about hits it off. But see here, before we go any further with this, suppose I call in Bryce."

"By all means," my caller assented, and I pressed a buzzer to summon Jim from his own room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEW ELEMENT.

HE showed up a moment later, shook hands and proffered Haddon one of his black cigars, which he declined.

"Too strong for my sensitive nerves, Mr. Bryce," he explained, and I offered him a cigarette. I was rather fancy in my tobacco because as a matter of fact I got most of it from Semi, who used it very seldom, but indulged, when he did, in the most exquisite blend I had ever found.

Haddon lighted the tiny roll and tasted the smoke with appreciation.

I told him what it was and he nodded with a smile. "We were just discussing Mr. Dual and the case you've been working on together," he drew Jim into the circle of our conversation. "And we were taking Gregson and Palls to pieces in a rather gossipy fashion, before Glace called you in. As a matter of fact, I'm acquainted with the woman in the case."

"Mallory?" said Jim sharply.

Haddon shook his head. "No, Vance. Do you suppose there would be a chance of my seeing her, now that I'm in the city? Nice girl, with a really exceptional voice. Heard her sing more than once, in New York."

"You could go down and ask Johnson. He's got the police end of this on his ticket," Jim suggested, and asked a question in turn. "Say, Haddon, just what brings you to town?"

The eyes of the man before us did not narrow. In fact they did not alter at all unless one looked clear down into their liquid depths. Then and then only would a close observer have possibly seen a tiny change in their appearance. For a moment he looked neither at Jim nor me, but studied rather the tip of his cigarette. Then: "Between ourselves, business, my friends," he replied.

"Goin' to be here long?" Jim was nothing at times if not direct.

Haddon laughed in a wholly natural fashion. He spread his well-kept hands in a little deprecating gesture. "*Quien sabe?*" he said.

"Oh, that's it?" Jim nodded. "Nobody knows—long or short, accordin' to what you have to do, eh? It's that sort of a case?"

"Yes, it's that sort of a case," Haddon agreed.

"Well, all right," Jim accepted his statement. "My only reason for askin' was that we've worked on a thing together before this and I thought maybe you'd like to take a hand in th' present matter, seein' that you know Vance, an' she's caught in a nasty mess."

"Oh, but," said Haddon quickly, "that other affair was a government case, my dear

fellow, and Glace tells me Dual says he intends to handle the rest of this matter himself. I'd scarcely like to interfere with his plans, even to the extent of volunteering any such assistance as I might give."

"Well," Bryce persisted, "it wouldn't do any harm for you to go up and see him. If he wanted to use you, he'd likely ask you to get into the thing himself."

There was always a bulldog tenacity about Jim, and now it appeared to me that he was in the mood to grasp at any straw that appeared to his mind as likely to offer a chance of arriving at a successful issue to the present case.

"Like to see him immensely," Haddon returned, lapsing into his almost drawling manner. "Man I respect, don't you know, immensely—most unusual type and all that sort of thing; interests one, flicks the imagination—appears more like a character out of a story book or something than one in real life. Might be a Magus or something like that, sitting around in those white-and-purple robes he affects in his most remarkable quarters, what?" He fiddled with his cigarette all the time he was talking, and watching him I saw the well-chiseled wings of his nostrils twitch. Abruptly he changed the subject. "Do you know I'd like to meet this Gregson and his running mate? From what you say, they must be possessed of means, not to say rich?"

"Oh, yes," I agreed. "Palls seems prosperous enough, and Gregson is the son of old Bill Gregson, who made a mint out of the chemical importing trade, I believe."

Haddon nodded. "Well, probably I'll run against him; I'm likely to be in town some days. Fact is, I've a lot of letters of introduction to present. Ostensibly, I'm not working, as of course, you understand. I'm—well—just following my usual manner of living. Still if I should bump into anything in my poking around, we'll probably get together again. One never knows what he will meet, either. As for instance, when I called at Miss Vance's this afternoon and learned what had happened and came on to ask if there were any objections, before trying to see her first."

"None, so far as we are concerned," I assured him.

"Thanks." Once more he lifted his eyes toward the ceiling. And then he dragged them down and met my glance and smiled in an almost whimsical way. "Jove, I wonder if there would be any chance of my being welcomed by your singular friend on the roof?"

I laughed. There was no denying that Dual's personality seemed to have taken an immense hold on Haddon's imagination. Also I suspected that he was a trifle more interested in the predicament of Gladys Vance than he chose to admit, which was natural enough considering the obscure atmosphere of the whole affair, and that any one who spent his time in ferreting out blind facts might find at least an impersonal interest in the case.

"If you really want to know, I can easily find out if he will make it a genuine welcome," I volunteered.

"Yes?" Haddon elevated his eyebrows.

"Yes indeed." I rose and approached the box of the private line behind me. I called Dual and told him Haddon was in my office.

"Send Mr. Haddon up," he replied without a moment's hesitation.

I hung up and turned around.

"Your welcome's waiting," I said smilingly.

"Eh?" he rose as I finished speaking.

"Well, that's awfully good of you old chap. Much obliged. I think I'll trot up there for a minute. See you again."

His stick in the crook of his elbow, his neatly folded top-coat over one arm, he opened the door of the private office and walked out with a farewell gesture of his hand.

"And," said Bryce in comment after his departure, "you'd swear he was a blithering fool, if you didn't know he was wise. Now what's the answer, m' son?"

"Answer?" I repeated. "Why he wants to see Semi—and—"

"He's a slick article," said Jim. "He wants to see Vance, too, you notice."

"Well, that's natural enough, isn't it?" I countered. "He knew her in New York, and went to call at her apartment and found her in jail. I consider it decent of him to come to see us first."

"Yes, I know," Jim admitted, frowning. "But—"

"But what?" I prompted.

"Nothin'," he told me almost shortly, and sat puffing away on his cigar, the folds of a puzzled frown upon his face.

I didn't press him for an explanation. Whatever it was he had in mind it seemed best to let him think it out. Besides it was getting late, close to the end of a rather tiresome not to say disappointing day, which appeared to me to have climaxed in Semi's incomprehensible declaration that the future steps in bringing the mystery to a solution would be taken by himself.

It was toward that statement rather than Haddon's call my own fancy turned. I leaned back in my chair and lighted another cigarette and tried to form even the slightest, the most vague conception of what he possibly could mean.

The blue smoke of the fuming tobacco curled around me. It was a special mixture Dual had once told me he obtained from the same supply as the former Khedive of Egypt. Egypt—I narrowed my eyes and stared at the glowing tip of the cigarette. It was a tiny red spark in the dusk of the November afternoon. It was like a little live ruby—or, with the ash about it, like a little red eye in a gray-lidded socket.

Egypt! Egypt was in the East. And Dual had said there was a hint of the Orient about this tangle we had been trying to unweave. And there was the strange story Gladys Vance told of the murder, as uncanny as any mystery of the Orient in its wording, and there were the red roses woven into a funeral pall for the woman who had died—red roses, scarlet roses—and there was the weird, the fiendish, attempt on the life of the girl in the prison hospital ward to-day as the result, and—there was the ivory pipe. And now Dual had said he was about to take the final steps in person, if I had rightly understood him. And here was I smoking an Eastern cigarette and trying to puzzle these things out.

Dual had said, too, that Gregson and Palls had none save an incidental connection with the case. A feeling of something like chagrin crept into my musing that I

should have attached so much importance to the broker and his friend. And yet—even Haddon—the finished, the post-graduated, government sleuth, had seemed interested in the two men in question when I had given him the facts.

I tried to draw a modicum of comfort from that consideration as I sat there. I had been fooled of course, but the trouble was that everything had a trick in this infernal business of, as Bryce, now scowling to himself over beyond my desk, would have said, "seemin' like what they ain't." Yes, that was the trouble. There were two interpretations possible in nearly everything that had up to now occurred. There were facts that couldn't be harmonized, as it seemed, with the statements made about them; there were explanations offered, which might or might not explain. And it was hard, as Semi again had said, to winnow the true from the false; to know which interpretation to take.

All at once I smiled. There was Jim puzzling his brain over Haddon's visit, which taken on its face was perfectly simple. Only Haddon, as my partner had remarked, was like everything else we had been meeting now for days, not at all so simple as he made it his business to seem—a man who kept his very life and all that it embraced masked as it were behind a continual disguise.

What the deuce, I found myself thinking, had brought the man to town, with a bunch of letters of introduction in his pocket—letters to be presented to society people, no doubt, since the society dawdler, the rich and purposeless man of fashion, was his customary pose. Some thing important of course, I admitted. The department did not send men of his caliber out on any other sort of case. It would be something then of a national or perhaps an international nature, he would attempt to unveil at least in a measure, inside the next few days. And on what of that nature, I continued my line of introspection, could he work while he led the life of a man whose chief employment was bound up in a round of calls and teas?

With a feeling of amusement, I realized that I had wandered from my original line

of thought and was now turning my attention to the identical consideration that seemed to be still holding Bryce. I dragged myself back and returned to the other problem. What did Semi-Dual mean by saying he himself would handle the further steps to be taken in the Mallory case? Not only that but why, I tried to decide, was it essential that he handle things himself? Admitting that there was a necessity, as I did not deny since he proclaimed it, why in the name of all that was reasonable did it exist?

Suddenly some hint of meaning seemed to wake and quiver up within me. If indeed there was a touch of the Oriental in the whole affair, as appeared in the manner of both the commission of the murder and the second attempt at a crime, surely Dual was best equipped to meet it with understanding. He was half Oriental himself, spoke Persian and Chinese as I was aware, read the literature of the two nations in the original tongue. Surely then he should be competent above all others to comprehend the workings of the Oriental mind. Was that it? And if so, what in Heaven's name did we face?

All at once, and as if in answer to that question, another thought leaped into my brain—as wild, as weird, as any other thing in the whole affair, and yet a thing which, if true, might as it seemed on first inspection, harmonize everything else—

"That's it," said Bryce, speaking for the first time in the past half-hour.

I started. His words came almost as a verbal confirmation of my own amazing thought.

"What's it?" I demanded turning toward him.

"Haddon," he announced.

"Oh, is he?" I returned more calmly. For the moment I had forgotten what he had been thinking about.

And yet his next words brought me up standing. "Yep. He's a slicker, I got to admit, and I'll hand it to him. An' I reckon I wouldn't have spotted his game if I hadn't had what you might call inside information. But—he came here after something, an' even if I don't just see how, I guess he got it. Remember what Dual said when we

was up there this afternoon? Well, Haddon m'son's the answer. He's th' new element in this case."

CHAPTER XXV.

SPECULATION.

FOR a long moment after his most surprising statement, I stared at Bryce.

It was almost as though he had voiced in a way those most bewildering thoughts I had just been considering myself. If indeed Norman Haddon were the new element Semi-Dual had said was about to enter the situation, then it might even be that the duty which had brought the government agent to the city, and the Mallory case, were one. In support of such a possibility, I now recalled another remark of Dual's.

He had said that the interests involved in the affair were great—of a vaster importance than any consideration of one individual's welfare, of one individual life. Taken in connection with Jim's suggestion, those words took on a new and different meaning. They excited speculation, thoughts of plot and counterplot, of the intrigue and adventure of secret diplomacy, of international dealings and complications. I suppose some of my emotions showed in my face.

Because all at once I became conscious that Bryce was smiling.

"Rather jolts you m'son, don't it?" he said, and then in mimicry of Haddon himself, "eh, what? Lord, he is a slicker, ain't he? but I bet I got his number. He blows in here hunting an earful after he finds out something that connects whatever work he's doing with th' Mallory girl and Vance. An' he gets into touch with Dual, just as he did with us, after he found we was workin' on th' case.

"Gordon, do you know what's happened? You've heard Dual talk before now on what he calls 'interdirections,' an' I savvy what he means enough to know that it's simply his way of saying that what anybody does affects somebody else than himself — that this game of life is like a lot of intersectin' paths, always crossin' one another if you get th' notion. An' what's happened now

is that th' path Haddon was runnin' out, an' th' one we've been followin' for days, have crossed. That about sums it up, I guess."

It was a long speech for Jim and he paused a little red in the face, but with an actual glitter of excitement that showed his supreme interest and conviction, in his eyes. More, I was inclined to agree with him myself, and I said so.

Jim nodded.

"You bet," he declared and chuckled. "That's why he wants to see his dear friend with the pretty voice, so much. My Lord that fellow's slick, an' by th' same token, of course, he wants to meet Bill Gregson an' Palls."

"Hold on," I objected; "Dual says they have only an indirect connection with the matter."

"It's indirections I'm talkin' about now," said Bryce. "Even an indirection may be a helpful sort of animal, I guess. I betcha that's how Scmi knew Haddon was due to show. You know how he works. Well—didn't he tell us there was actors in this not identified as yet th' other day, an' don't you suppose he was wise from th' position of some of them signs of his in his cart wheels, that somethin' out of the ordinary was comin' off?"

"Good God, Jim," I exclaimed rather thickly, "that's a most surprisingly clear explanation for a man who pulls some of the stuff you do about Semi's work."

He grinned. He appeared very well satisfied with his own deductions. "Well," he rejoined, "I ain't such a fool but what I can see somethin' what's just about dead open an' shut."

"Out of the mouths of babes and fools wisdom," I retorted.

"Meanin' I'm which?" he countered.

"Meaning," I told him as a fresh wave of conviction seized me and swept me before it, "that I think you're right."

He nodded once more grinning. "Even you exhibit sense at times m'son. An' with them two teamin' up on the trail of these jaspers, whoever they are, you can look for somethin' to drop."

But if Jim was right in his opinion, there was very little to support it beyond our be-

lief and perforce we let it go at that for the time.

Edwards blew in the next morning, and mooned around for a good half-hour. He brought no information with him, and of course we had none to give. Actually I felt sorry for the fellow. He was positively getting seedy in appearance. His face was drawn, haggard and in need of a shave. There were dark hollows reminiscent of sleepless nights and worry about his eyes. He was almost painfully on edge.

In lieu of anything else, I questioned him concerning Gregson's visit on the previous day to Palls. But he had nothing to add to the fact. The young man had simply driven up in a high-powered roadster and entered the broker's office. He had remained the best part of an hour and left.

"But there is one thing I haven't told you," Edwards said all at once. "You remember that woman who sat back of the screen at the funeral the other day. Well, yesterday she drove up in her limousine and sent in for Palls just about the time he always leaves for lunch. He came out and got in with her and they drove away."

"Mrs. Lee?" I inquired, wondering whether the mere fact that the woman and Palls had probably kept a luncheon engagement had any real bearing in the final equation.

"I don't know what her name is, but I know the woman by sight," Edwards returned. "D'y'e know her?"

"I know her name and that she sent that red pall to cover Peaches's casket," I told him. "She lives out in the old Wyndham property, and Bryce and I saw her yesterday afternoon in her own house."

Edwards frowned. "She sent 'em, did she? Glace, I suppose I'm growing morbid or something, but I'm getting so I try to see something that isn't there in everything I happen to run across."

I nodded. "That's natural under the circumstances, it seems to me," I replied.

He got up and stood scowling across the room before he abruptly burst out: "Good God, how long are we going to go on like this? How long has that girl got to rot in their filthy jail? I saw her yesterday afternoon, and I tell you there's something funny

about this whole works from first to last. She was pretty well over the effects of that damned drug, but some way she isn't herself. And when I told her how hard we all were working, and how little we had accomplished really, d'y'e know what she said? She said I mustn't worry, because she felt sure everything would come out all right."

"Well," I said, "I should think you'd be glad she could say it. You ought to be glad she can feel like that about it."

"I am, of course," he flared back sharply, and then in an altered tone: "But, Glace, it made me feel as though she knew something the rest of us didn't—as though—oh, hang it, I guess I'm nutty, but the way she said it, and the way she looked when she said it, made me feel as if she'd been holding something back—had an ace in the hole she would pull if she had to but wasn't ready to use."

"You'd better go get some sleep if you can," I suggested, because, as he spoke, I suddenly found that I wanted to get rid of the chap and think.

And he nodded. "All right," he accepted meekly. "I guess maybe you're right, and I'm making a lot out of nothing, so—I'll mosey off."

But I wasn't sure he was making something out of nothing as I watched him vanish. Haddon had suggested an incomplete presentation of all the facts by Miss Vance, and now Edwards, who knew her rather better than any other man as one might suppose, was advancing the same supposition. And simmered down to the briefest terms, that amounted simply to the proposition that Gladys Vance might or might not know something she would use only as a last resort and to save her own life. But what—what could she know, and why had she kept it, if kept it she had, to herself?—for what object, to serve what end? I turned and twisted the thing this way and that in my brain, endeavoring to find some plausible solution.

There might even in the present light be something of what both Haddon and Edwards suggested I thought in the girl's assertion the first day we called upon her in her cell, that whoever had stabbed Noriene Mallory had expected some one else to open

the door. And yet she had denied any knowledge of an enemy who might have sought to reach her in so unbelievable a fashion, almost as soon as she had voiced the other assertion. Only now, I wondered if that denial had been an evasion—if she had sought to turn the matter off as a mere suggested possibility; if, in other words, she had momentarily said too much and thereafter had tried to divert our attention from it, by making it appear a mere suggestion rather than anything else.

Dual's assertion that Miss Mallory had met her death through an error, came now also to appear in a different guise. All at once I began to feel as though I was seeing light in the dark maze of the whole affair, dimly; as though I were standing on the threshold of heretofore undreamed things; as though it were possible after all that the impossible might in some such fashion be explained; as though Edwards's chance words might have placed in my hand the key to the whole unbelievable tragedy in the rooms of Gladys Vance the night of the Victory Ball. And the upshot of my thinking was that I came to the decision that I would call again on Miss Vance, that afternoon.

That decision I carried out.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"YOU TOO?"

I FOUND Miss Vance still in the hospital, but sitting up. There was a current magazine on her knee and a vase of what looked like Edwards's red roses, on a tiny iron stand at the side of her bed. Taken all in all, there was about her an atmosphere of decided cheer.

She smiled as she saw me coming and extended a hand. "Good afternoon, Mr. Glace," she greeted me as I paused and the attendant brought me a chair, "do you believe in numbers?"

"In numbers?" I returned. "I'm afraid you'll have to be more explicit."

She nodded. "I've had two surprises already to-day, and your visit is the third."

"And the other two?" I took the chair supplied me and sat down.

"A visit from a dear friend, Mr. Haddon, who tells me you are acquainted, and the statement from him that he knows the strange friend of yours you were telling me about the other day—the one who reads the truth in the stars."

"So you know Haddon rather well?" I inquired. Plainly the fellow had beaten me in his visit to the jail. Oddly the thought gave me a sudden desire to smile. There was a stealthy speed to the man both in action and thought at all times, that seemed to contribute largely to the results he gained.

"Oh, yes," Miss Vance told me quickly. "I knew him in New York before I came to your city. He has a really silly way of talking, but he's an awfully good sort."

"As it happens I know exactly what his 'silly' way of talking covers, Miss Vance," I said, and looked straight into her blue-gray eyes.

She uttered a short little, low-pitched laugh. "He's really a very clever person, isn't he, Mr. Glace."

"Very," I agreed. It struck me she was making conversation rather than according me an opportunity to ask questions, to learn. "Miss Vance, just what made you think that whoever rapped on your door the other morning, might have expected you to open it yourself?" I switched the subject under discussion rather abruptly.

"Why—" the eyes I watched widened and darkened swiftly, "the fact that they came to my rooms, of course, Mr. Glace."

She spoke with an almost surprised innocence, too, as it seemed, but I wasn't satisfied. "You had no other reason? You can't think of any one who would have been likely to come to your rooms for such a purpose?"

"No. As I told you before, I can't think of a single person who would have done such a thing as that, Mr. Glace."

The form of her answer struck me. "Perhaps not a single person, Miss Vance," I said. "But how about a group of persons?"

"Mr. Glace!" she cried out softly, seeming to stiffen a trifle, and went on after that first involuntary exclamation: "Won't you please say exactly what you mean?"

"Yes, Miss Vance," I acceded to her suggestion, "I will." For now it came to me that I had surprised her; that she had not looked for the exact line of interrogation my questions were taking, and I did not intend to lose the advantage of that surprise. "Your intimation that your death may have been intended, the other morning, gains strength from the fact of the second attempt made inside the walls of this very prison, upon your life. You must have asked yourself, and you can not expect that I will not have asked myself, why that attempt was made. And there is only one answer which seems to cover the situation, that being that for some reason those who made it, wished by encompassing your death, to effectually close your mouth. And if that explanation is the right one, then there remains no supposition worthy of consideration except that you must be possessed of certain knowledge in regard to some person or group of persons, which, if divulged, would prove most inimical either to their welfare or their plans."

For a long moment after I had finished, Gladys Vance did not speak. Nor did she look at me directly. Rather she held her eyes on the fabric of the silken negligee she was wearing, at which the fingers of one of those graceful hands I had noted the first morning in her own rooms, were picking, picking. There was the attitude about her of one debating a question, trying to reach a decision. So for a time I sat in silence and then I prompted her answer:

"Miss Vance."

She threw up her head and met my glance. Her own lids were narrowed. "That is a surprisingly logical deduction, Mr. Glace."

"And—what do you think about it?" I continued to press her.

"I think," she said, smiling all at once, "that Joe Edwards made no mistake when he told me he had obtained the cleverest local man of whom he knew, to look out for my interests in this case. The police regard me as a murderer, because they found me beside a dead body, while you at the worst appear to consider me no more than an adventuress."

It was a somewhat skilful parry, and yet

it was a parry none the less. She was on the defensive and I felt it and I didn't intend to let her use either compliment or the personal issue as a means to her escape.

"You spoiled a very pretty speech in its ending, I'm afraid, Miss Vance," I told her. "And if the first part was sincere, you should give me credit for being able to discount the last."

And like a beaten fencer, all at once and with most surprising swiftness, she dropped her point. "I do—honestly I do, Mr. Glace," she burst out with a quivering mouth. "And, oh, please believe me, I do appreciate all your efforts in my behalf. And—I'm going to tell you something I ought not to tell you, to prove it. Do you know what is meant by the letters I. S.?"

"I. S.?" I repeated and sat there stupidly looking back into her steady eyes. "You—too."

"I too—you brute," she said with a tremulous laugh that made her words into a most miserable pun and robbed them of all hurt.

And for just an instant after that, it seemed to me that the hospital ward got up on the legs of its little iron beds and began to waltz slowly around. I. S. stood for Intelligence Service, and Haddon was one of the government's "unknown" agents, and this girl—this little singer—oh, hang it—the whole thing was plain enough now.

"Does Edwards know?" I asked at length.

"No." She shook her head. "And you mustn't tell him. Our value lies wholly in our not being known, Mr. Glace, you understand, and I've told him all I could. I told him everything would come out all right, but I couldn't tell him why, and, of course, the poor boy couldn't be expected to understand."

I nodded. "I won't tell him," I promised "But—you do know something?"

She smiled again as she answered. "Yes, Mr. Glace."

"What?"

She shook her head, still smiling. "Too much, and still not enough. That's why I sent for help. And that's why I was so sure after the first shock of my arrest and the horror of its cause that help would be

sent. And I've been waiting, waiting for it—only—it is sometimes hard to wait. But at the risk of seeming stubborn, I'm going to ask you not to urge me to tell you anything else."

"They sent you Haddon?" I said.

"Yes. And, oh, Mr. Glace, this friend of yours must be a very, very wonderful man, because when Mr. Haddon saw him yesterday afternoon, he found that he had learned the truth of what lies behind all this miserable failure of mine, to accomplish the task I was set. Mr. Haddon says it is the most remarkable thing he has ever met. He told me about it this morning, and it seems your friend had worked the whole thing out. He was even able to tell him things and suggest others we did not know, and had not thought of ourselves. And he—he sent me a message by Mr. Haddon. It was so peculiarly worded: 'Tell the Little Toiler in the Workshop of the World, that the Innocent find in their Innocence an Eternal Buckler, when the Sword of Justice is Unsheathed!'"

"Yes, that sounds like Semi-Dual," I said as she paused with a little caught-in breath.

"But who is he?—who is he really, Mr. Glace?" She leaned toward me. There was a strange, awed something in her wide eyes, her parted lips, the sound of her lowered voice.

"The most remarkable man I have ever known, who knows the truth of Life as I have never found another who knows it, and worships Justice, and defends Innocence, and Respects and Protects all pure women, whom, because life comes to mankind through them, he calls Toilers in the Workshop of the World, Miss Vance," I told her as I rose.

"I see," she said. "A Toiler in the Workshop is a woman, and a Buckler is a Shield, and the Sword of Justice is—"

"Just that, Miss Vance, when once it is unsheathed."

And then I left her. Indeed, I wanted to leave her. I had given her something to think about, and I had a lot to think about myself. And the biggest thing of all was that as early as yesterday afternoon, Dual had known, had held the solution in his

hand—that Haddon had gone to him and found him with the key to the mystery in his possession, ready to turn it and unlock whatever dark secrets it might conceal, at the appointed time.

Yes, Dual had known, and yet a certain elation filled me as I turned back toward the Urania and walked along. Semi-Dual had solved the problem, but—I hadn't done so badly myself. I had been on the right track this afternoon, and I had gained some very definite knowledge concerning what had been going on, even if I didn't know the exact nature of the thing Miss Vance had, as a government agent, been fighting.

Indeed, I felt quite proud of myself as I considered all sides of the question. And for that very reason I formed the plan of visiting Semi's quarters on the roof. It wasn't often I could bring him anything one could exactly denominate a surprise. But I fancied that he would hardly be looking for the advance in understanding I had gained this afternoon. Consequently, when I reached the Urania, I took an express cage and went straight through to the twentieth floor.

I climbed the bronze and marble stairs. I went up the garden path. The chimes rang out, announcing my approach. The door of the tower opened, and Henri appeared.

"Hello Henri!" I accosted him in buoyant fashion. "Semi inside?"

But if I had come with the thought of giving my strange friend a tiny surprise, at least, I found the tables very effectively turned inside the next breath. For Henri answered:

"The master is not here."

"Gone out, has he?" I said. That fact in itself was unusual enough since Dual rarely left his own little self-created domain. But, of course, he did at times. "When will he return?"

Henri shook his head slightly and spread his hands disclaiming knowledge by both word and gesture.

"I do not know, Mr. Glace. He left earlier in the afternoon on a mission of his own devising. He left word for you also, that should you seek to find him, I was to say that until you received positive direc-

tions, you were to think of him as one who had abandoned the passive rôle for the active in seeking after truth.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DUAL DISAPPEARS.

FOR a moment I stood there looking straight at Henri in what I suppose now was a stupid fashion, and then I turned and went back down the path, and across the annunciator plate with its chimes beating out behind me, and down the stairs. And I don't think I said a word. I just left him standing there at the tower door. I had come up here to carry a possible surprise and I had been so greatly surprised myself that just at first I think I was a trifle dazed.

I caught a cage and went back to my office and inside my private room and closed the door. Then I rang for Jim, and when he came in, I told him what had occurred.

"Disappeared, has he?" he remarked rolling his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. "Well, you should worry, seein' as he said he was goin' to handle the rest of this himself, an' that he left word for you to wait for definite directions. He was wise to somethin' yesterday afternoon as you must have noticed, an' after your talk with Vance to-day, you'll admit he an' Haddon's got somethin' pretty big on th' string, I guess."

I nodded. "Oh, yes. Haddon, of course." To tell the truth, I felt a little jealous of the government agent just about then.

And Jim seemed to understand for he grinned. "Federal 'tec' on a department assignment, m'son—an' th' new element in th' case as I pointed out to you yesterday just before we shut up shop. Just the same I bet that clever jasper is doin' what Semi-Dual tells him right now. Didn't th' girl as good as say it was Dual handed out th' dope when they come together? An' if I ain't right—if he ain't takin' those steps he talked about, an' Haddon don't know it, an' ain't teamin' with him—why has he disappeared?"

I nodded again. "All right Jim," I said,

"your logic is sufficient. I guess I'm a little bit peeved."

Bryce chuckled. "So's Johnson. I saw him about noon. Haddon went down there to see Gladys, an' said we'd said he might, if Johnson had no objections, an' you know Johnson met him—once, an' knew him again. So now he's clean up in the air, an' he wanted me to tell him what was in the wind, an', of course, I couldn't, an' he thought I was holdin' out on him, th' boob. Said he was goin' up to see Dual himself this afternoon, an'—" He broke off abruptly as a rap fell on the door.

"Come," I called.

The door swung wide and Jim went on in what might have been the finish of his interrupted sentence, save that he made it an exclamation. "Holy smoke—talk of the devil!"

Inspector Johnson stepped into the room and closed the door behind him. He faced about, ignoring Jim's sally; "where's this man Dual gone, and what's he up to?"

"Sit down Johnson," I said with a feeling of amusement as I pictured his trip to the roof and his rush back to our office. I waved him to a chair.

But he shook his head. "Don't stall," he retorted scowling. "I went up there and that man of his said he had 'departed on a mission of his own devising.' Now what's up? There's something funny about this whole damned business, with this man Haddon showing up an' spendin' a hour with the Vance girl, an' Dual's blowing out all of a sudden. What is it? Come across."

"We don't know what it is," Jim told him as he reached a blustering end. "Now sit down if you want to, or stand up if you don't. It ain't more than fifteen minutes since we learned Dual was gone ourselves."

"But he left you some word, I reckon?" Johnson seemed impressed by his old running mate's positive assertion.

"He did," said Jim. "He told us to wait till we heard from him again. That's what Henri told Glace. You don't want to let little things excite you Johnson; it's bad for the health."

The inspector grunted, but took the chair at last. "What's Haddon got to do with the business?" he inquired.

"Maybe you'll find out when him and Dual get the thing cooked ready for serving," Jim responded. "Up to now he hasn't exactly what you might call taken us into his confidence."

"The fact is," I added, "that the thing appears to have a far wider bearing than appeared on its face at first. Dual hinted at something of the sort, though, days ago, but didn't explain its nature."

"And he's working it with Haddon now," said Johnson, with a visibly quickened interest.

"That's the way it appears to us," I agreed.

Jim nodded. "Yes," he declared, "an' if he is you can bet he's gone right to th' heart of th' thing he's meanin' to uncover. That's why he's found it advisable to disappear."

Disappear really seemed the very best word to describe Semi's absence, too, during the succeeding days. So far as the coming back of any word or sign to indicate his existence, he might never have been. Haddon, too, was most noticeable by his absence. He didn't show up at the office, and Johnson didn't see him, and he did not call at the jail again.

Edwards was the only one of the interested parties who caught even a glimpse of the fellow, and that was purely due to the fact that he still kept up a rather hopeless watch on the movements of Palls and Gregson. We hadn't called him off after Dual's denial of any active participation on the part of the two men, mainly because to do so would have entailed difficult explanations. Consequently in so far as he could compass it, Edwards's espionage of the broker and his friend went on.

Two days after our talk with Johnson he blew in and announced that Gregson had driven up to Palls's place and gone inside with a man corresponding to Haddon in description of both appearance and dress. He didn't seem to attach much importance to the information, but said he brought it to us for what it was worth. As a matter of fact, Edwards was rapidly reaching the hopeless stage in his feelings over the whole affair, and viewed from his standpoint, and the little we had seemingly accomplished,

it could have been nothing short of remarkable had he done anything else.

"Quick work," said Jim, however, after he had left. "Haddon said he wanted to meet Billy, you remember, and it looks like he has, an' not only that, but he seems to have done it so darned well, that Billy takes him down in his bus to see his good friend, Palls. Uncle Samuel knew what he was doin' when he gave that guy a job. He's the clear quill, Glace."

"I know," I agreed; "but Dual said those chaps' connection was wholly incidental. And if they really are working this together, why in time is Haddon wasting effort on Gregson?"

"Why is a fish?" said Jim. "Water would be cleaner without 'em. Maybe he's playing Billy for a sucker. That guy 'd play anybody for a sucker if he needed to in his work. I'll betcha he's usin' his society racket on Gregson to help him gather dope."

"Possibly," I accepted the suggestion. Indeed, it seemed a pretty good explanation, and I couldn't think of a better one myself.

That was Wednesday afternoon, and after that another three days dragged by and brought the end of the week, and with it that most amazing end to the whole affair, of which it is so much easier to think than to either write or speak.

Saturday afternoon a messenger boy brought to our office suite a sealed envelope, addressed to Messrs. Glace and Bryce. Little dreaming what it might contain, I yet opened it at once.

The contents consisted of a half-page of clear-cut, legible writing:

Will you kindly get into immediate touch with Inspector Johnson, and request him to hold a squad-wagon in readiness with men for a call between ten-thirty and half after eleven to-night? He will, I am sure, permit you both to accompany him on the run when it occurs. S. D. says these are the directions you have been awaiting.

N. H.

S. D. says these are the directions you have been awaiting. N. H.

For a moment I stood staring at the lines. "S. D." was Semi-Dual, of course, and "N. H." was Norman Haddon, and— I

folded the sheet and reached for the buzzer to summon Bryce.

Fifteen minutes later we faced Johnson inside the detectives' room, and the message was in his hands. He read it.

"What the—" He began to read it again. And then he looked up and met our eyes, and his lids were narrowed. "Do you reckon this straight goods or a plant?" he inquired.

"Straight goods," I replied without hesitation. "Nobody but his man knew he had left me a message couched in exactly that fashion, and Henri wouldn't spill."

"Then we'll be ready for the finish of this business whatever it is, though I reckon if anybody knew why, they'd say I was crazy." Johnson doubled up a fist and hit his desk. "I suppose you're going to ride when the wagon starts, as this suggests?"

"We'll be on it or on its tail in a taxi," I informed him.

He nodded as though he understood my feelings. "All right. Be here about ten."

We said we would, and went back to the office and discussed the note, and fidgeted around. There wasn't any use trying to do any consistent work with our minds brimful of what must be coming off between half past ten and eleven-thirty that night. We went out and had dinner, and tried to kill time at a movie; and were back under the green lights in front of the station on the first stroke of the clock. We went in and found Johnson waiting, a cigar between his teeth and his hat on the back of his head. He welcomed us with a grin.

"Well," he made comment on our arrival. "At least nobody could accuse you birds of not bein' right on time."

Jim countered with a remark about Johnson's being all dressed up and no place to go as yet himself—and after that nobody said much of anything. That atmosphere of just waiting for we don't know what made the nerves of us all somewhat tense. Bryce ignited a fresh cigar. I lighted a cigarette. Nine thirty came after a time, and ten o'clock at last. After that at least another half-hour dragged itself away before I looked at the clock and found it ten thirty-five.

Ten-forty.

The minutes passed on leaden feet. Bryce was scowling as he smoked. If one only knew for what he was waiting! It was the uncertainty of it all that made the tension so intense. I found a fresh cigarette, noting as I did so that Johnson's cigar had gone out, and that instead of relighting it, he was chewing on the stub as he sat staring at the telephone on his desk. Scoff as he might at Dual's methods, as opposed to those of the police, there could be no doubt but he, like Jim and I, in the present instance was on edge.

Ten forty-five—

Abruptly the telephone buzzed.

Johnson caught it to him in a flash.

"Inspector Johnson talkin'," he rumbled in a voice gone a little thick with the strain of the waiting.

And after that he held the receiver crushed to his ear while a muffled voice snapped and crackled and died within it; then: "Gotcha," he cried, and jammed down the phone and sprang to his feet, jerking his hat from the back to the top of his head. "Come on. That was Haddon talkin'. We're wanted at the Wyndham house."

The Wyndham house. The words repeated themselves as Jim and I sprang up and followed him toward the door. The Wyndham house—the home of the woman who had sent the pall of red roses to the Mallory funeral the week before. We were wanted there now. Haddon had said so—and not for an instant did I doubt that in so saying he had been no more than the mouthpiece of Semi-Dual. Then—then—Semi-Dual must be there at the present moment—in the Wyndham house, and—master of the situation. The conviction seized me as I took my seat in the wagon with the men and Johnson and Bryce.

"But it's darned queer, all the same," the inspector growled, as the motor roared and we were off. "I've been throwing a lot of feeler's out in that Jane's direction ever since I first heard about her, and I haven't dragged in a thing. Th' worst I've got was that some of th' swell push sort of sniffed at th' mention of her name, an' admitted they didn't care for her acquaint-

ance; an' against that she seems to be pretty well in with a lot of society folks."

"Yes," I said; "I noticed that myself—with society members of a certain class."

"Certain class," Johnson repeated, and suddenly broke off, to resume with a deeper, more impressive manner: "By th' Lord, I've got it. I reckon we're going to th' place you was askin' about th' day of th' murder, Bryce."

"What place?" said Jim. Plainly he hadn't caught the notion.

"The' place Palls could take a girl like Peaches for a week-end party," Johnson growled. "Yep — that's th' answer. They've been runnin' a private hop joint for that sort of no-account men and these here society molls. Th' place is secluded enough, an' well out, an' they've just been doin' what they pleased. Yep, that's it, by the Lord!"

"Johnson!" I exclaimed, "You're right." For all at once I saw it; marveled that I had not seen it long ere this; was sure of it, utterly convinced. The Lee woman had been running very much such a place as Jim had suggested days ago in discussing her morals, after our call upon her, plus, as as an added attraction, an indulgence in illegal drugs, and Gladys Vance was a government agent, and had sent for help to handle something she had not said what, and—she had known the nature of the thing going on in the Wyndham house, of course. In a flash I saw the whole thing, even as I caught a gasping "My Gawd" of comprehension from Bryce.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

THE wagon turned up the drive under the arching branches of the leafless trees, and came to a throbbing stand before the house.

At once, as he clambered out, the door swung open and a man in evening dress appeared.

It was Haddon. I knew him at a glance, even despite a most peculiar expression on his face.

"Bring your men inside, inspector," he

said in oddly flat tones, and drew back and stood waiting until Johnson had complied. Then, without another word, but in the manner of a man either badly shaken or completely overawed, he turned and led the way up-stairs.

We trailed along. Save for the lighted halls, there was no sign of life about the place. That was the first thing, outside Haddon's manner, I noted as we mounted first one and then another flight of steps, and came out at the very top of the house at last into what had once been the lounge of a ball-room, as I guessed.

There Haddon halted us by a lifted hand. Seen at close view, under the brilliant light which flooded the antechamber in which we stood, his skin held an unwonted pallor and his eyes were surprisingly wide. That aspect of the man was more noticeable in view of the fact that I had never before beheld him shaken in poise.

He seemed to appreciate his own condition in a degree, for all at once he spoke, for the second time since we had arrived: "Gentlemen, you will pardon my behavior, I trust. I have to-night passed through what is without doubt the most amazing experience of my life, and I am not exactly myself. But, to the best of my ability, I am endeavoring to do what I have been told."

"Just what's coming off here, anyway, Haddon?" Johnson asked, casting his eyes about the apartment, which was a wonderful riot of color, the predominating shades of which were red and gold.

In an almost involuntary fashion the Federal agent's eyes turned toward what seemed a brazen door at the end of the chamber. "I am instructed to allow you and Messrs. Glace and Bryce to see for yourselves," he said, moving a step toward it. "You will leave your men here and come with me, if you please."

"Hold on," the inspector stayed him. "Where's all the people that run this dump? I didn't see a soul as we was comin' up."

Haddon smiled rather oddly. He reached the door and laid his hand upon it. "Come with me and you shall see," he replied with a flare of excitement. "God, man, don't

you understand? Everything was staged for your arrival. They're—all of them—in here."

And after that announcement there was silence for a time. I looked at Bryce. His face was pale but stolid, his expression that of one set for anything that might come. His eyes met mine briefly and turned off, running around that unbelievably decorated room, with its gold, its red, its life-sized sculpture of human figures in bronze and marble, some of them wonderful works of beauty, some of them out of all proportion, odd, distorted shapes, extended into impossible lengths, or squat, lewdly paunched, and grotesquely weird, its tapestries of inconceivable labor, its braziers of burning incense, the perfume of which hung high against the ceiling in a slowly shifting, blue-gray, nebulous cloud.

As Jim's eyes left mine there came upon me something at least of what Haddon seemed to be feeling; of the oddness of that scene, though, Heaven knows, I didn't realize what had led up to our coming at the moment, and then it merely struck me as a most remarkable scene with Johnson and his men, and Bryce and me, in that room, more like the reproduction of some page out of the "Arabian Nights" than anything else, and Haddon between us and the brazen door, just beyond his hand.

All that in a flash, and then Johnson seemed to comprehend.

"You boys stay here till you're called," he addressed his men, who had huddled themselves together, and turned back to Haddon.

And Haddon opened the brazen door.

We passed in, and he let it close behind us.

How to describe what we saw!

It was a great room. In the former days of the Wyndham house, the ball-room must have been a beautiful place. But now its windows were deadened, built in, converted each into a panel upon which had been painted a picture. So much I saw at a glance. And of those pictures, the less said the better. They were wonderful in execution. Beyond that, in any attempt at description, I shall not pass, save to say that the entire room had been redone into

an apartment in keeping with the wild, exotic, erotic motive they set, depending wholly for its illumination on artificial light.

At the farther end was a dais—a raised platform supporting a table and two chairs of what appeared to be gold. And in them were the woman of the wheaten hair, the Mrs. Lee whom Bryce and I had met, and the Chinese butler, the former a wonderful vision of material beauty in her nearly nude condition, the latter most gorgeously clothed. A cap of gold and red sprinkled with glinting jewels was on his head, a robe of wonderful workmanship incased his slender form, golden cases were upon his fingers. His dark eyes stared straight before him, and his red lips leered.

His companion seemed no more than a sinuous female shape incased in gems, between the whorls and strands of which her flesh gleamed white. A jeweled cincture supporting gem-incrusted breast-caps caught her body about the chest. A coruscating girdle cinctured her supple length above the hips. Jewels of wonderful luster gleamed in her hair and in the bracelets and armlets that clasped her creamy skin. And it seemed as though twin rubies had been joined to form her lips.

And the rest of the room—that part below the dais. Two rows of tables were there, stretching from it toward the door; tables such as one saw pictured or read of in ancient stories, provided with padded couches for seats in lieu of chairs. They glittered with a wealth of service, a blending of silver and glass and gold and porcelain such as I had never seen. They groaned beneath a load of costly viands and flagons of tinted wines. And the couches were occupied—they supported couples, men and women, caught, as we entered, in the abandonment of that feast of appetite and license in which they had gathered to indulge. In the space between the tables there were others—only these were women, servitors, some of them, plainly by their scanty garb and the dishes, the flagons of wine, the fans of feathers; others dancing girls, entertainers, as one could see from their garb, the trappings of their lithe and slender bodies, shamelessly revealed.

Back of the woman on the dais stood a huge negro, his extended arms supporting a gorgeous feather fan, and midway of their length and between the tables was a flaming spot of red—or red and white—or no, a flower—a huge, artificial poppy—a monstrous thing with wonderful silk petals, and in its golden center—the glowing figure of a woman, seated like some beautiful feminine Buddha—tables and couches all over the place, little tables of wonderful workmanship; gorgeous couches covered with marvelous paddings and shimmering silken shawls and coverlets and scarfs; a wonderful perfume mounting toward the gilded beams that supported the roof, in trailing spirals of azure smoke, from braziers fuming slowly throughout that temple of illicit pleasure, that gorgeously appalling shrine of material indulgence, that unholiest of unholy places into which we had passed.

And yet it was all like some dream of an artist's brush, some fantastic and wonderfully executed picture; because as I stood there my breath caught in my throat, the blood, as it seemed, rushing back in a choking flood upon my heart, incapable of speech or movement, robbed of every sense as it appeared, save that of sight, in that first moment of realization, there was one, and only one, figure in all that terribly beautiful chamber of exalted sin that gave any sign of life. Save him, and him alone, not one of those before me, caught, as it seemed, in the spell of some subtle enchantment, either spoke or moved. It was like looking on some scene set forth with life-sized figures done in the colors of life, rather than on life itself.

It was as though some spell had descended upon them, binding each eternally fast in his or her momentary pose.

For instance, the jewel-sheathed woman on the dais sat proudly, disdainfully erect. The arms of the jet-black creature behind her were stretched for the sweep of the fan above her wonderfully coiffured head.

And what was that before the table at which she sat? For a moment I had thought it a dog, and not only it, but several of its fellows. But now, as I viewed them more closely, I saw they were men like any of their fellows, but men shaggy, with some-

thing approaching an actual pelt on the skin of their bodies, their heads, and even up to the dark sockets of the eyes in each aboriginal face; men—servants, past any doubt, as shown by the single loin-cloth twisted about each shaggy waist.

"Circe and her swine. God, Glace, I've heard of the stunt, but I never saw any one do it."

"Circe and her swine." I knew it was Haddon's voice beside me, but I didn't answer. I couldn't. His comparison was apt enough, too. This scene was like enough to the mythological story of the enchantress and her dupes, save that Circe seemed to have fallen to the selfsame spell that bound these others all about her. Still it was not a bad comparison. It was really like it, if one considered it just a picture, or it was like—

Belshazzar's feast!

The words flashed into my brain almost as though spoken by an audible voice, and the single figure—I had noted as seemingly unaffected by the arresting spell that bound the others—the figure in splendid robes and trappings, wearing a turban upon its head, standing midway between the dais and the huge, red, silken flower, in which gleamed the creamy form of the girl, like the very spirit of the poppy, turned.

It turned and I saw its face, without any surprise, as the face of the man who must have wrought this amazing condition, as the face of the one man of whom I knew who possessed the power to have done it—as the face of Semi-Dual.

Gold and purple were the robes that clothed him from head to foot. Gold and purple—the highest colors in the human aura—the colors of purity and truth. And white was the turban above his brows, in the center of which gleamed an enormous ruby, that caught and fastened my eyes—caught and fastened them, held them, seemed to draw them to it.

Slowly, slowly one of the arms rose, stretched out, extended in its gold and purple folds. He pointed:

"Behold!"

His voice, deep, resonant, compelling, yet as monotonous in its accents as the pulse of the ocean heard at a distance as it beats

upon its shores, came to my ears in measured tones.

And as he spoke, the heads of those at the tables, of the little spirit of the poppy, of the dancers sprawled on the floor of the place between the tables, of the hairy dog-men—I knew now for the hairy Ainu, the aborigines of Yedo—of the servants, the huge negro on the dais with the fan, turned, lifted and stared in the direction of his pointing finger—stared, and held staring, while, as it seemed, the words: ‘*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.*’ I saw them—and I knew Jim and Johnson saw them. I heard the former gasp and the other gurgle deep in his throat, and the heavier rasp of their breathing.

The Feast of Belshazzar. Those words—those same words had gleamed before the eyes of the King in the midst of his pomp and glory.

And then:

“Ye are weighed in the balance and found wanting. Wo to him who is so weighed and found wanting when the appointed hour calls him to an accounting. Wo, and again I say unto you, wo,” came the voice of Semi-Dual.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“AWAKE!”

ITS sound was the sound of doom itself. It seemed to fill all the place, to vibrate from floor to roof. It dominated the sense of hearing as Dual's majestic figure dominated that of sight. Beside me I heard a gasp and Haddon speaking:

“My God, what a power for one man to possess! When he told me he would do it, I doubted, in spite of all I knew about him. But he did it. I saw him do it. He came here days ago, and he's been living in the house. I got in through Gregson, and I knew something was due to happen when he told me to send you that note this afternoon, but I couldn't conceive of anything quite like this. He—they—they had him slated as an Eastern magician—the principal entertainer before they started their hemp and opium orgy—and they called him to do his stunt, and after that—some way

or other—inside the wink of your eye, he'd made them into puppets, things absolutely under the control of that terrible will of his. And then he told me to go down and call you—and wait till you arrived.”

All that I heard dimly, even managed to answer by a nod. And at the same time I found myself in a most peculiar situation. For all the time I heard Haddon speaking, and understood what he said, I was seeing those flaming letters on the wall, at which all the others stared with widened eyes and faces gone, underneath their rouge, as white as death. Indeed, I was very much like a man in the earlier stages of ether anesthesia, where he is still conscious that the anesthetic is being given, still capable of a certain amount of volition, yet begins to experience also the hallucinations induced by the state into which he is sinking by degrees.

,Even so, I knew that I was in a mildly hypnotic state; that those I saw before me were completely beneath Dual's control; that he had employed mass hypnotism, the old Eastern trick made use of by the fakirs of the Orient to cause their audience to see a non-existent boy climb up an unsupported rope which does not exist.

I had seen him do the same thing once before. Consequently I knew now that those letters of fire were not actually present before my eyes, although they appeared very real, and at the same time I comprehended Haddon's words—how Semi had gained entrance to this house; how he must have come here and passed himself off, through his knowledge of the Chinese tongue and the ways of the Orient, as the Persian noble, which, on his father's side, he really was.

I had known him to appear in the rôle of Prince Abdul of Teheran, to gain the ends of justice, ere this; and even in my state of semihypnosis, I knew he was doing it now; had sensed it, in fact, the moment I saw him in his gold and purple robes, with the turban on his head, and the immense ruby gleaming out from its snowy folds.

It takes time to explain all this, but in reality it passed through my brain in a swift, comprehensive flash, and was pushed

aside as the man Henri called the Master, resumed his speaking:

"Wo unto you who are found wanting; to you who have made it your labor to soil the spirits of your fellows, through your knowledge of the weakness of the flesh; who, for your own selfish reasons, have made men into libertines and women into harlots; who have scoffed in the face of the Most High Who created them in His image, and breathed into them the breath of His Spirit which is the Life. Wo unto you and thrice wo, for the wage of your doing is death.

"Wo and again wo unto you who have harkened to false teachings; who have wasted the days of the spirit's pilgrimage in a pandering to the weakness, the appetites, the animal lusts of the flesh; who has crept night after night to the shrine of the self-styled priestess of Nirvana, duped, tricked, through your own frailty, into seeking unclean sensation, the end of which was the euthanasia, the forgetfulness of sensation by exhausted flesh.

"Wo to you men, who, rather than fathers of children who should bless you, have become the fruitless partners of women who have sold their holy birthright for a material mess of pottage. Wo unto you women who have gone, laughing, into a spiritual degradation, against which, save for the blighting curse of this temple of drunken indulgence, you would have fought with your latest breath. For ye have been drunk, I say unto you; drunk on wine; drunk on sensation, of the eye, the lip, the body; drunk on the license exalted before you into something beyond the reach of others; drunk on drugs.

"And to preserve you still within her power; to assure your continuance as the means of her parasitical living; to guarantee that you should still continue in your false sense of enjoyment that she and her consort might feed upon you, while seeming merely to feed with you, this impure priestess of yours has stopped not in striking an even swifter blow at life. Wherefore I say again to you, *behold!*"

The letters faded from the wall and left it black, as black as only absolute emptiness may seem. And then 'that blackness

quivered and other things appeared, like pictures on a screen.

There was a passage with doors on either side. I recognized it as the corridor of the Tosca. It was empty, utterly void and empty, save for a ceiling light. But abruptly there came into it figures—two men and three women. They came out of the door of an elevator cage. I found that I knew them. They were Gregson and Palls, dressed as a troubadour and the devil. There was *Red Riding Hood* and a Watteau shepherdess, and there was Noriene Mallory herself. They passed down the corridor and entered a door.

Again the screen was blank for an instant before a different part of the corridor appeared. It was an end terminating in a window, and outside that window, as I watched, a hairy face—the face of one of the dog-men—appeared. It stared up and down the passage and drew back quickly.

Abruptly the corridor seemed to turn around. I was looking the other way. A door opened and Noriene Mallory came out. She walked along the passage and entered another door, after what seemed a cursory knock. The corridor again reversed itself. The dog-man was again looking in through the window. For a time he clung so, and then clambered through the partly lifted sash. He was most surprisingly clothed in a wonderfully embroidered robe. In a flash of understanding I comprehended that he was so garbed because of the occasion when the murder occurred; just as I had known for moments that I was looking on a mentally projected moving picture of Noriene Mallory's death; just as I knew others there must know what it was they were seeing, since they had known the girl.

The murder had been done on the morning after the Victory Ball, and the murderer had been garbed to resemble one of the attendants of that extravagant function. Taken so, his shaggy, hairy face would have passed to the most casual observer for a most remarkable mask.

He made his way through the window, and came to the same door Noriene Mallory had entered. He fumbled under his robe and drew a heavy knife, and, holding it firmly in his hand, he rapped.

Except for the hypnosis that held me, I think I should have cried aloud in that instant; for, as he gripped his weapon, I caught one never-to-be-forgotten glimpse of a sinewy, hairy hand—of the same hand, I could have sworn, I had seemed to see in Noriene Mallory's room as I held the weapon used to compass her death in my grasp.

But I was incapable now of speech, locked, chained like the others by the will of Semi-Dual. I stood and watched while the door opened and showed Peaches Mallory's figure; watched while the weapon the hairy man held flashed out and under her arm and into her side; while the girl reeled backward, and the knife was thrown after her falling body, and the door was closed; while the murderer turned and walked rapidly to the turn of the corridor and along the angling passage to the stairs about the grille of the elevator shaft, and went leisurely down them, pausing near the foot of the last flight as the cage shot up with a load, then sauntering across the foyer and out.

And yet not to disappear save for an instant, to then reappear stripped of any vestige of clothing, standing with bowed head before the man and woman on the dais, while they addressed him as one sensed from the expressions of their faces, the movement of their lips, and indeed from his position and bearing, in words of passionate rage. And suddenly the woman turned to the man beside her and spoke to him, and shrugged her shoulders and laughed. And the man nodded, sprang to his feet, and struck a slender dagger into the dog-man's breast; after which his fellows were called in and given the body, and they carried it out, their faces contorted by what appeared emotions of an angry nature. The body was taken outside as the picture followed its progress, and was buried under a clump of trees behind the house.

Once more the whole scene changed. It showed the shop of a florist. A limousine stopped before it, and a woman got out. She was the same woman as the Priestess of Nirvana, but now she was modishly dressed, and wearing an expensive sable coat that hung nearly to her knees.

She entered the shop and engaged the

florist in conversation. She moved about the place. After a time she paused where a bundle of parcels seemingly wrapped for delivery were piled upon the counter, and as she still talked to the florist, she began idly moving these about. Suddenly she seemed seized by a determination. She spoke with an altered manner, lost her indefinite pose. The florist hesitated briefly, excused himself, and hurried toward the rear of the shop. Swiftly, then, the woman drew from beneath her cloak a package, which she substituted deftly for one of those on the desk, concealing the one she had removed.

She was still piling them about in idle fashion when the florist returned and once more addressed her. Seemingly his remarks were satisfactory, for they appeared to reach an agreement, and the woman at once returned to her car and was driven off.

Again came Dual's voice:

"Those flowers were sprinkled with a deadly powder; they were meant to encompass the death of a woman who had been inside this place of unholy pleasure, whose knowledge was a threat against it and all who entered its unrighteous doors—the same woman the man was sent to kill the night of the Victory Ball—at the door of whose room, expecting her to answer the summons of his rap, he slew Noriene Mallory, one of your companions, by mistake. And to insure their being sent to her cell at the prison, where she lay falsely charged with murder, those who sent them once more prostituted the holiest of life's emotions, made a sport of love itself, and included in their fatal package one of her lover's cards. These things they did to protect their own nefarious traffic in order that they might continue to prey upon you, and from you enrich themselves. But now I say unto you that the wages of sin is death. And again I say unto you, 'Behold.'"

He turned. Once more his arm rose and pointed, but to the dais now where the gorgeously unclothed woman and her Oriental consort sat.

"Behold," he cried again, "the beauty and the ending of the flesh!"

And as he spoke, the skin of the woman

shriveled, the robes of the man grew tattered, and, even more unbelievable still, the flesh of each fell away in putrescent, festering masses, and left each sitting there at their splendid table, a skeleton of bleaching bones.

"Evil," said Semi-Dual, "is like a worm which lurks in the heart of a flower to destroy its beauty. Evil destroys what it touches. Like the worm in the flower, the evil in men's souls destroys and brings the death of the spirit unless itself destroyed. Behold I say unto you yet once more, the worm of evil feeding on the fairest things of earth."

And now he pointed to the huge artificial flower, where suddenly a monstrous shape, a terrific, sinuous body, reared itself above the petals and laid hold of the girl still crouched within them—the little spirit of poppy—to begin a voracious feeding on her flesh.

The thing was dreadful beyond all dreaming, such a horror as may come upon the opium user, I have understood, in dreams, when the drug turns upon its victim and rends him with terror rather than fair hallucinations; produces pains, pangs, dreadful horror, rather than a sense of well-being and pleasurable thrilling nerves.

And then as quickly as it came, it vanished, and again Dual was speaking.

"It is finished. And ye shall awaken when I speak the word, to speech and conscious understanding, yet bringing back with you, to be remembered throughout the span of your remaining lives, the truth which I have shown you in these things—that it is in the flesh that death makes his eternal lair, and that only in the spirit may life spread its exalting wings. For such is the plan of the Divine Wisdom of Him Who created you men and women, on Whom we call crying 'Om, Om,' and for the third time, 'Om.'"

"Mr. Johnson."

Beside me, Johnson answered hoarsely, "Yes?"

"Mr. Haddon."

"Here." Haddon's response sounded in a sobbing breath. The spell that held me was gone, and I turned toward him. His face was chalklike in its pallor.

"Mr. Bryce."

"Here." It seemed a sort of roll-call.

"Gordon, my friend."

"Here, Dual!" I cried back with a swelling heart because of his choice of terms.

"Inspector, you and the others remain till this is finished. You have posted your men?"

"Yes."

"It is well," said Semi-Dual. "Leave them in the antechamber to this hall of lecherous evil. We approach the end."

And then his voice altered, sank back to its monotonous tempo. "And now once more I say unto you—awake!"

A sigh, a hoarse respiration ran through the chamber of mentally chained bodies, and ended in a woman's scream. A creature little more than a girl lifted herself from a silken couch and started running blindly, staggered a dozen steps, and dropped in a quivering huddle, overcome with the experience forced upon her, too far overwrought to effect her attempted escape. A man started up, lifting a clenched fist. Somewhere a woman sobbed.

That waking from the enforced enchantment of Dual's induced hypnosis was like the sudden breathing of overtight nerves. Once more a phrase heard but never fully understood came to my conscious perception. In that phantasmagoria of horror he had showed them, they had been given a glimpse of hell itself, and now there followed a wailing and gnashing of teeth impossible to describe, as each smirched soul among them sought to express itself.

Until suddenly the nearly naked woman on the dais lifted herself with a wonderful flashing of jewels, and cried something in a language totally unknown to me, but which brought the dog-men to their feet with a flashing of concealed knives from hidden sheaths.

And having gained their attention, she lifted a slender arm that shimmered with jewels upon it, and pointed at Dual.

In a flash I understood, and my hand sought the weapon in my pocket. She was setting her pack upon him, bidding them do him to death. I gripped the butt of the automatic and half dragged it out, sensing that Johnson and Bryce and Haddon were

arming themselves in similar fashion, preparing to throw themselves against the hairy group of savage slaves.

But there was no need for our intervention, because swiftly with the snarl of beasts, the Ainus flung themselves, not on the man standing before them with folded arms, but upon their mistress—the one who cried them to the attack—and the gorgeous figure at her side.

I know I cried out hoarsely. I heard men shout and women scream. Bryce choked beside me, and Johnson started forward a pace and paused.

For the scene was hopeless in its horror of writhing, shaggy bodies. Men and women had disappeared, completely overborne, lost, so far as we could discern, as a fox may be caught and brought to earth by a pack of throttling dogs.

And the dreadful thing was over almost before we had sensed it. The Ainus drew back, their vengeance glutted; and who could say which among them had let out the guilty lives of the ones they left behind them, inasmuch as they had done it with their sinewy, hairy hands.

As for the others in that splendid temple of sin, terror came swiftly down upon them—the terror of impending doom. They sprang screaming, cursing, pleading to their feet, or sank down in impotent attitudes of waiting. They clung together, gripping one another with straining hands.

"Peace," said Dual as the aborigines drew off. "It is finished. So does the evil men serve turn upon and rend them in the fulness of time. It was their brother who was slain. I have seen his grave, even as I showed it to you. It is the justice of the flesh against injury to the flesh you have seen exacted—the primal justice, the fate of those who draw the sword against their fellow men. For it is written that those who draw the sword, by the sword shall they perish. This thing was ordained for them from the beginning, when the measure of their own misdeeds should be full to overflowing. Hence I saw no reason to raise my hand against the operation of the law of retributive justice, which, in its own time, shall measure unto each what he deserves."

"And that's all they got!"

Without warning, the spirit of poppy—the girl in the heart of the scarlet flower—sprang up and stood swaying, a slender shape, upon her feet. Oddly, too, as she spoke and moved, she gathered the petals about her, veiled herself in their silken folds, and held them crushed against her. "She plotted the whole works with that husband of hers, Fong Lee, just like you showed it to us; though how you knew it yourself, God knows."

Dual turned toward her, tore free a single gigantic petal, wrapped it about her, and swung her to the floor. "How do *you* know it to be the truth?" he questioned.

"I heard her," the woman panted. "I heard them talkin' about it; they were tryin' to get that other girl, Mallory brought to this house. She was a girl Peaches was tryin' to get against the stuff, on account of another man. But—she wouldn't use it, and they got suspicious of her after she was gone."

"And that's the God's truth!" Into the tempest of the human maelstrom rushed the figure and voice of Palls. "She planned it; she tried to carry it out—and it was her—her, really, damn her—that killed the girl I loved. I didn't know a thing about it, and neither did Gregson—until after the second attempt on the other girl's life. Then Gregson pinned her down, and she told him how she switched the flowers.

"Why—why, it was her that called at our office the morning after the murder and picked up Edwards's card, and took it with her without knowing, and told us we'd have to be careful of him; that one of her men had seen him leave the Tosca with the police and the girl and a couple of others, and asked us to report to her anything he did."

"Ah, yes," Dual said slowly as the broker came to a gasping pause. "And you told her about meeting him in the florist's shop?"

"Yes, I did," Palls nodded. "But I didn't know what she meant doing until after it all was over, so help me, God."

"But you made a business of coming here for these week-end orgies?" Semi pressed him.

"Yes, I did that," the man admitted. "But I didn't know of any plan for murder. I wouldn't have countenanced that, and neither would Gregson. The game wasn't worth it. We—"

Dual's voice interrupted him coldly: "You mean the traffic in drugs?"

There were beads of moisture on Palls's forehead, but he nodded. "Yes, that was all we had to do with it, really. Gregson got the stuff for them, and—"

"Run right along out. They're waitin' for you, Bill." Inspector Johnson was speaking. He was looking toward the form of a man slipping stealthily along the wall toward the anteroom door; the form of Billy Gregson, whose father had built a tremendous fortune by the wholesale import of drugs.

"You have lost the woman you loved, the woman you might have saved, had your manhood been of a different type," said Semi-Dual. "There remains to you, George Palls, years in which to contemplate those truths in the seclusion of the cell in which for a time you shall live.

"Mr. Johnson, take into custody Mr. Gregson and his partner, whose confession we have just heard, and this young woman, who is a material witness to the justice we have seen done this night as it appears."

Justice! Ah, yes, justice had been done. And having been done, it was being not only confirmed, but explained. Suddenly as I stood there everything was plain—the task Gladys Vance had undertaken; the treachery of Peaches Mallory in seeking to seduce the woman who would have befriended her if she could to a degrading habit in order to discredit her with a man she had failed to gain for herself; the reason why the little Federal agent had sent for help, after she had been in this house of shame and found she might not handle the undertaking alone; the mission of Haddon to run down and lay by the heels those who were known to be infringing the law against the illegal use of drugs; the motive which had led to the attempt on the life of Gladys Vance and ended in the death of one of their own number through the mistake of the Ainu and *his* killing as a punishment for his error, to seal his mouth,

to discipline and inspire fear in his fellows, poor slaves in a strange land where very few save their masters understood their tongue.

Oh, yes; it was all plain enough now; as plain as the reason why Dual had found it necessary to complete the matter by his own efforts, to enter this house, and in person seek the truth that justice might be done; as plain as the reason why Haddon had cultivated Billy Gregson and his friend, who, as it appeared to me, had in his attempt to support the words of the girl, now wrapped in the scarlet petal, once more slipped and convicted Billy Gregson and himself out of his own mouth.

All these things passed through my mind as Johnson advanced and gathered in his men and the woman, who went with him, head bowed as in a new-found shame, trailing her single garment about her naked feet, a modern Magdalene.

"But for God's sake, what about the rest of us?" a man's voice rose hoarsely above the sobs of the women, their half-hysterical outcries, the heavier mouthings of his fellows, as the brazen door shut the men and the little scarlet shape from sight.

"For you," Dual's voice came calmly still in answer, "let us trust, in God's mercy, some day, peace, as ye will it or refuse it, according to your future acts. As ye sow, so shall ye reap; atone, if ye desire it, for the past. Inspector Johnson will take his place beside the door, and as you leave you will give him your true names. What disposal he shall make of them lies wholly in his and the Federal government's hands. But if ye will harken to my words yet a little further, eschew in the future the slavery of the spirit to the body; the slavery of the body to such things as this and all for which it stands." He drew from his garments the ivory pipe and held it aloft. "Forswear evil habits, evil association; let the breath Om breathed into your bodies exalt them. Beyond this with ye I have no further concern. In so far as I have any part in the matter—this is the end."

He paused and sank into a chair, while Johnson and Haddon took their stand at the door through which those who left must pass.

And one by one the revelers approached them—men with haggard faces; women seeking with tense and quivering hands to clutch about them their gorgeous raiment, grown now into mantles of shame; dancing girls, the little nymphs of latter-day life, gone silent, their vapid chattering hushed, whispering the fancy names of their calling to Johnson and Haddon, wide eyed.

So they passed—the last of the inmates of that Temple of Euthanasia, as I was yet to learn the place had been called—and passing left behind them the group of hairy Ainus and the giant black on the dais, kneeling beside the body of the false priestess, his mistress, whom they had slain.

"Semi," I said as the last of the guests disappeared through the brazen door. Toward the last I had drawn closer to him.

And as I spoke Johnson approached with Haddon, and the former added his voice to mine, jerking a hand at the Ainus and the negro.

"What shall we do with them?"

Dual raised his head. He had been sitting with it supported on a hand. "The

black is a half-wit; let him be cared for. As for the others, I think Mr. Haddon will see them deported," he said. "Enough. I am weary, my friends. For days I have compelled my spirit to tolerate what sickened it, filled it with loathing, to accomplish a certain end. And now that it is accomplished, I return to my abode."

"But, Dual," I stayed him as he rose slowly and Johnson turned away to bring in some of his men and take the negro and the Ainus in charge; "how about Miss Vance? We can hardly call this ended until her position is disposed."

He looked me full in the eye and, despite the terrific strain he had been under and the weariness it had induced, he smiled.

"For her is a new beginning. I was not forgetting," he replied. "Hence, when a new dawn brings with it the hopes of a new day, you will instruct Edwards to call for her at the prison and lead her forth from its gates, shriven of all suspicion, her former task accomplished, to take up with him her greater mission as a toiler in the workshop of the world."

(The end.)

Taming of Jim Bater

by H. P. Holt



JIM BATER was a tryer. His worst enemy would never have denied that. But in money matters he was hopeless. A dollar, to him, was essentially a thing to spend. Ten dollars only meant that he could spend a little faster. When a hun-

dred came his way he merely lived at lightning pace for twenty-four hours. If by any chance the amount had been greater he would probably have scorched the track, so to speak, as he shot along.

And yet he was not vicious. The fact

was that he knew no more about the value of money than he did about the fourth dimension. While cash lasted he lived in an impossible fairy-land, and then came to earth with what the cub reporter describes so poetically as a dull, sickening thud.

Jim had done everything from working an elevator in a Manhattan hotel and making a book on the race-course to gun-running in the Solomons, from pearlizing at New Guinea to presiding over a Frisco faro layout, from peeling potatoes on a square-rigger to practising as a dentist—home correspondence school, full course forty-five dollars—in Wyoming. He was inherently honest, and that ought to have got him somewhere, but he never succeeded in putting a single toe of either foot as far up as the second rung on the ladder of success. Now gray hairs were beginning to show over his temples at the age of thirty-four, and he was slowly coming to the conclusion that fine linen and purple raiment were never meant for him.

He was six feet tall in his socks, strong as an elephant, and desperately in love with Barbara West. She had no illusions about Jim. He was one of the best fellows in the world, but the tide that is supposed to give every man a lift toward fortune once in his life had not yet come Jim Bater's way.

There was perfect understanding between Barbara and Jim on the subject; they just had to wait till he struck oil. Maybe some day he would, and then they would get married, if the oil didn't trickle through his fingers before he had time to buy the license. Meanwhile time was trickling on steadily. Jim wrote to the girl dutifully from divers places, and Barbara as dutifully replied. As a matter of fact she had more faith in him than he had, but that is the way of women sometimes.

Jim's latest escapade had been nearly to lose his life in a wreck off New Guinea, and incidentally he went to an infinity of pains on that occasion to drag through the surf a passenger who had gone down twice and never expected to cast eyes upon this wicked world again. The passenger, when separated from the water he had swallowed, produced a thin wallet, peeled off a sodden ten-dollar bill with that extreme care which

is suggestive of near-poverty, and offered it to his rescuer. Jim, rather than hurt the man's feelings, was going to accept it, when it occurred to him that parting with that ten dollars might hurt the passenger's feelings more than the other thing.

"You buy yourself a good feed with that when you get the chance, mate," he said; whereupon the passenger, with celerity which seemed positively indecorous, replaced the bill in his wallet. You see, people of Jim Bater's kidney haven't been sufficiently hardened to accumulate wealth. You may think Barbara was foolish to wait for such a mortal, but the man who has wrung the price of limousines and a Fifth Avenue mansion out of the rest of us, isn't always the easiest sort of person to live with.

In spite of her adoration for Jim, Barbara was an extremely practical-minded person, and when he casually mentioned, in a letter, that he had been wrecked and almost drowned, that young lady awoke with a jerk to a realization of one or two facts. And chief of those facts was the knowledge that her Jim, alive, was infinitely more precious to her than twenty dead Jims would be.

Whereupon Barbara pointed out to him in an epistle which was delivered months later in Sydney, that it was about time he ceased wandering over the face of the earth in quest of elusive fortune, settled down, instead, to a commonplace job in his home town, and married her right away without any more palaver.

"We don't want to wait till we're both tottering with old age before we wed," she wrote, "so just you come right back to Manster. We'll get married at once, and your uncle says he'll keep you busy."

This notion had a tremendous appeal for Jim. The rolling stone begins to find that rolling palls when it doesn't gather any moss. And Jim surely was gathering nothing but his gray hairs. He never, however, got away from the conviction—a conviction which was sheer hallucination—that he only lacked opportunity to make himself wealthy. It is an hallucination which he shared with a good many folk, only he had it rather badly.

However, Jim peeled potatoes—in lieu

of paying passage money, because he was financially embarrassed—all the way from Sydney to New York, spent three-quarters of his wages, with angelic simplicity, on absurd presents for Barbara, and arrived in Manster with a smile, fifty cents, and a light heart. And Manster killed the fatted calf for Jim Bater, not because the good folk of his home town regarded him as a prodigal exactly, but because everybody liked him and everybody was glad to hear that he meant to stay this time. Not that any one—except Barbara West—really believed he would stay for any great length of time.

Meanwhile Barbara let no grass grow under his feet. The date for the wedding was fixed, and Jim went to work in his uncle's repair garage, cleaning cars, pumping gasoline and covering himself with grease. His uncle, Mr. Christopher White, explained to Jim that if he stuck to his job and learned the business thoroughly he would soon be earning enough to keep his matrimonial ship afloat comfortably and might eventually be taken into partnership.

Whereupon Jim, true to his own fantastic notions, immediately made suggestions for enlarging the establishment on a colossal scale, as though income and capital expenditure had no relative value whatever. Christopher White, who knew Jim, merely smiled, kept his new assistant busy, and pursued the even tenor of his own way. And the days crept on until it was the eve of Jim's wedding. The knot was to be tied on the Wednesday afternoon. On the Tuesday evening Christopher White appeared at the house where his nephew was rooming.

"Anything wrong, uncle?" asked the prospective bridegroom as soon as his eyes alighted on Mr. White.

"Why, no. Of course not, not a thing!" protested Mr. White emphatically. And his very emphasis was significant. For Christopher White was ordinarily about as excitable as a dyspeptic clam.

Jim eyed his uncle queerly. Mr. White had two little hectic spots on his usually colorless checks. There was a distinctly peculiar glint in his eye, and a decided restlessness in his manner. "I just thought I'd

come round and talk. Last night you'll be a bachelor, y' know, and all that."

Now Christopher White was the warmest supporter of total abstinence that the United States of America ever had, so Jim naturally thought his uncle must be feverish. He was going to suggest a visit to a doctor, when Mr. White, after coughing twice, gave an inkling of what was troubling him.

"It's an expensive proposition, this matrimony, Jim," he said.

Jim smiled. He always did when the question of ways and means cropped up. It is possible to do that, you know, when you are a bachelor, healthy as an ox, and possess two arms and legs.

"I guess we'll get by," he observed airily.

There was a pause. Christopher White folded down a rebellious leaf on his cigar, struck a match and forgot to use it.

"Say, Jim," he began afresh, "I've known you ever since you were the height of a silk hat, haven't I?" What he did not say was that he had as much affection for Jim as if he had been his own son.

"Why, yes, I suppose you have." Jim was vaguely suspicious that some sort of a lecture lay on the offing.

"And I've known Barbara West all her life, too, haven't I?"

Jim nodded.

"I want to tell you right now," his uncle went on, "that Barbara has a better business head than most of the successful men in Manster, whereas there never was a man or woman drew breath in this town who knew less about handling money than you do."

Jim stiffened perceptibly. "Well?" he said dryly.

"Now, don't get mad," remarked his uncle. "If I weren't interested in you I shouldn't go out of my way to talk like this. And—and—well, I'm in a funny position, because there are some things I can say and some I can't."

"What I came here to-night for was to make you promise that if ever you are well off you'll turn your money right over to Barbara. Because if you don't, you'll lose it, as sure as the Lord put stars in the heavens."

"You mean, hand her my wages?"

"No, I wasn't thinking of that. I mean if ever you come into a big sum, I want you to give it into her care."

"But," protested Jim, "if I had capital enough I'd double it in six months. No. I won't bind myself with any promises."

"Then you'll lose every cent," snapped Christopher White. "Look here, if some one offered you a great pile of money—more than you could even count if you kept on all night—what would you do?"

Jim thought for a moment.

"I'd drop dead!" he said at length.

"But if you didn't drop dead?"

"I should probably take it," Jim grinned.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the other. "You see what a child you are in such matters! Won't you just do as I ask? Make me a promise."

"No, because I might happen to make good some day," said Jim easily. "You know I'd give Barbara a square deal, but if ever I got the chance—"

At that moment a knock was heard at the street door, outside which a motor was throbbing, and a man's voice was heard asking for Mr. James Bater.

"Here I am," said Jim, going to the head of the stairs.

"I want to see you privately," said the man.

"Then come in," suggested Jim.

The man entered Jim's room. He was a businesslike looking person with keen eyes and a snappy manner.

"Good evening, Mr. White," he said, nodding cheerfully. "I wanted to see Mr. Bater alone, but I guess you don't count, as you know all about it. Do I definitely understand from you that this is the man I want?"

Jim frowned.

"What do you mean—want?" he asked suspiciously.

"This is Jim Bater, all right," replied Christopher White. "Now don't get excited, Jim. Nobody's going to bite you."

An expansive smile spread itself over the face of the automobilist as he retired from the room to his car and returned a few moments later with a small steel box on which were painted the letters "P. H." This he deposited on the table with an air

of importance while Jim watched with growing curiosity. The automobilist cleared his throat and, still beaming, glanced round at his audience of two.

"My name is Kirby, and I am a lawyer," he began. "To-morrow is the day on which you are to enter upon the state of matrimony, Mr. Bater, therefore, according to the last will and testament of Peter Hegan, this is the night when I have to present you with a most remarkable gift—"

"Peter who?" asked Jim.

"Peter Hegan."

"Never heard of him," Jim declared. "Sure there isn't any mistake?"

"Where were you on the afternoon of January 19 last?" asked the lawyer.

"Why—why, let me see now. Oh, I was nowhere near here. That was the night I was wrecked on the coast of New Guinea."

"Precisely! And do you now recollect meeting Peter Hegan?"

"Not a bit."

"You pulled a man out of the water."

"Well?"

"Exactly. That was Peter Hegan. Afterward he asked you where your home town was, and you told him."

Jim leaned forward slightly, and the puzzled frown on his forehead began to disappear.

"If that's so I'd forgotten it. Go ahead, I'm getting all het up."

"Mr. Hegan was a peculiar man," the lawyer went on. "Most peculiar in some respects. He had worked for many years on the Australian gold fields, made a fortune, and was then told by the doctors that he only had a few months to live. He wanted to see America again before he died, but he wouldn't have done that if you hadn't pulled him out of the water."

"However, he had no relatives, and as a matter of fact he had no friends, either. This is not hearsay, but facts as he gave them to me. He admitted freely that he had worked like a slave all his life and that—well, that generosity had never been his chief characteristic. He had absolutely no one to leave his money to, and as you had taken the trouble to save him from drowning in, he decided you had earned it."

"He went to a specialist in New York,

who told him he was within a month of the grave, so he came on to Manster and made inquiries about you. He found that you were a tryer and that you wanted to marry Miss West. He gave your uncle here a vague idea of what his plan was, but even Mr. White has no idea of the size of Peter Hegan's fortune.

"Under the terms of the will—Mr. Hegan died a week after signing it—his property was sold and converted into actual money, so that we should be able to surprise you by handing it over in cash on the eve of your wedding. Mr. Hegan planned all this himself. In round figures, Mr. Bater," the lawyer concluded, producing a bunch of keys, "that steel box contains a million dollars."

"A *what*?" Jim almost shouted.

"A cold million," repeated the man of law, inserting the key in the lock.

But the key did not fit, and Mr. Kirby displayed signs of agitation. He tried another key, with equal failure. Then, growing still more agitated, he tried to force a key into the lock, but gave it up, wiped his brow, became extremely apologetic, and admitted he must have brought the wrong key.

"It is entirely my fault," he said. "The other key must be in my office safe, on which there is a time-lock, so I cannot recover it before morning. However, the money is here, and that is the main thing. I will come from town in the car first thing to-morrow with the right key."

"And so," said Jim to his uncle, after the lawyer had gone, "this is what you were driving at, eh?"

"Yes, lad. Now, won't you be sensible and hand that over to Barbara?"

Jim bit his lip.

"I've wanted a lump sum like that for some time," he said. "I've got schemes in my head. Before long I'll double that million—maybe multiply it by ten. And I'll show you now that I do know how to look after money," he went on, going over toward a telephone. He spoke into the receiver.

"Hello, there! Give me the police station. Is that the chief? Hello, chief. This is Jim Bater. I want you to send a couple of men up to my room immediately.

They're to stay here all night, and I'll give them fifty dollars a piece for the job. Men about nine feet high, if you have 'em. No, no trouble. Just for protection, that's all. Send 'em right along. G'night, chief. much 'bliged."

"I'd best put you two wise," Jim said to the police officers when they arrived, "so that nothing can go wrong. See that steel box? There's just one million dollars in cash in it. All you've got to do is to keep both eyes glued on it till the bank opens in the morning."

With events crowding one on the top of another in this manner, Jim had no desire to sleep, and he spent the early part of the night smoking and chatting with the two policemen. Later he grew pensive. He had heard stories of buried treasure on a certain island in the Pacific. This deluge of gold would enable him to get up a mammoth expedition. He would have a huge army digging up the whole island, if necessary.

In these circumstances Jim had the implicit confidence of positive childhood in himself. Also he thought of Barbara, and the creature comforts he would be able to buy her with a million dollars—with millions of dollars. The night wore along until the little clock on the mantel-shelf said the morning was four hours old. And then Jim dropped off to sleep, sitting bolt upright in his chair.

Thus were two perfectly good policemen left in charge of the steel box; and a million dollars sounded like quite a fortune to them. There are men in darkest New York who can be hired for fifty dollars to do your bidding, even if you bid them kill. And—well, they were not the first policemen who suddenly found they had their price.

When Jim awoke he found he was gagged and trussed up to his chair so securely that all he could do was to raise his eyebrows. And that was the condition in which his uncle found him when he arrived, not very long after dawn. In a few minutes the wires were buzzing all round the countryside, but the two missing policemen had vanished like ice in the noonday sun.

And never did a bridegroom enter upon his wedding day with such a saddened heart. With bare fingers he could have

torn the two thieves to pieces had he but laid hands on them. His only consolation lay in the fact that he had insisted on Barbara being kept in ignorance of his avalanche of wealth until she had actually married him. Christopher White fluttered between anger and intense scorn.

"Bound to happen, sooner or later!" he spluttered, when the hue and cry had been thoroughly started. "It isn't in you to know what the *power* of money means. Only you let some one get away with it even quicker than I expected. Maybe, now that you've had your fingers properly burnt, you'll take my advice next time you get more than fifteen cents accumulated all at one time."

"Oh, I'm an idiot, and I admit it," Jim declared with a white face and the utmost conviction. "I ought to be kicked all the way from here to Honolulu and then kicked back again. You were right, and I was wrong. The only thing was that they trimmed me in the way I least expected it."

"But they always do," retorted his uncle vehemently.

"Well," declared Jim, with a new light of determination in his eye, "I swear if ever I get a bit of luck like that again—"

He was interrupted by an automobile pulling up with a jerk and a snort under his window, and Mr. Kirby, the lawyer, entered the house unceremoniously. Jim listened to his footsteps with a glum face, and cast a sidelong glance at Mr. Kirby, but he was too full of wo to speak.

The lawyer entered the room with a somewhat abashed air. In his arms he carried a steel box, the appearance of which at first made Jim leap out of his chair.

"I thought that was the right key," the lawyer began, "and it was. But I made a mistake. There were two steel boxes exactly alike, each with Peter Hegan's initials on it. They both stood on my desk. After I locked the money up in one of them my

clerk put one of the boxes back in the safe, but they were so much alike that he put the wrong one away.

"I owe you a thousand apologies, but it was partly Mr. Hegan's fault for bringing me two boxes identical in appearance. The other only contains worthless securities which we could not sell at any price. See, the key fits this all right," he went on, lifting the lid and displaying bundle after bundle of bills, a veritable sea of money, "and I hope, Mr. Bater, you will forgive this little—"

"*Lock that up again!*" Jim was towering over the lawyer now, his eyes ablaze. "Jump into your car, quick, and drive like the very devil to that yellow house at the corner."

He had his great arms clutched round the treasure chest, nor did he relax the strain on them until he was in the presence of the girl who, in another few hours, was to become his wife.

"I've brought you your wedding present from me," he said stertorously. "It's—it's a million dollars, Barbara. I—I kind of lost it once, early this morning, but a miracle brought it back. I'd lose it again, and miracles don't strike twice in the same place, so—"

"Jim, have you gone crazy?" the girl asked.

"Yes, I'm crazy about you, Barbara," he said, relapsing into something of his old easy-going self, now that he had thrown off his shoulders the awful responsibility.

Barbara looked at the contents of the box as Jim opened it, and then glanced at the clock.

"The bank is just opening," she said with a degree of calmness which astonished Jim. "We'd better go down and deposit this immediately. Come along. Now, Jim, don't get so excited. We'll have this where it's safe in a few minutes, and then I want you to tell me all about it, dear."

When West Met East on the Latter's Home Grounds

EASTWARD HO!

BY WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINIE

The Adventures of a Modern Lochinvar in New York

The Volcanologist

by Philip M. Fisher Jr.

CHAPTER I.

GODDESS OF DAMNED SOULS.

I SAW the whole thing. I saw it from the rather commonplace, though I admit unusually situated, beginning, to the appalling catastrophe at the end. I saw it. I beheld the slow change that Kilauea wrought. I observed the break, the physical and mental collapse, that Mme. Pele, that volcano goddess of damned souls, forced up on my good friend Harrison Rhodes—forced upon my practical-minded, hard-headed, only fact-believing friend and man of exact science, Professor Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist.

And yet, seeing that change, I did not foresee the inevitable end of it all. Seeing the approach of the breakdown, I did naught to avert it. Seeing that final pitifully horrible climax—I simply stood stupefied, and, with unseeing, or perhaps benumbed mind, saw with my eyes—and yet did nothing.

I see now that nothing could have been done. The thing was inevitable.

I did not cross to the islands with him. He took the Lurline, which landed him directly at Hilo, so that he had only thirty miles by automobile to land him at the very crater itself. So had he always been —eager, direct, ever quick scented and on the job.

I took the sugar boat Manoa, landed at Honolulu for a fortnight or more with friends—and thence, on the little Mauna Kea, leisurely traveled through the islands,

the two hundred odd miles that separate these main cities of the Hawaiians.

Every minute of that passage was full of grace and color and strange interest to me—the pure sapphire of the snow-flecked water and the skimming dash of the flying fish on either side, the tawny browns of the smooth sloping flanks of algaroba skirted Molokai and Lanaii, the vari-green checkered cane fields on swiftly rising Maui; at Lahaina the slender leaning coconut palms and low lying habitations crowding so eagerly about the gleaming white staff from which glowed in the setting sun the good old "homy" stars and stripes; a night of crystal clearness and constellations that hurt my eyes, then morning and Hilo; and the drive through cane, bananas, guaves, tree ferns—to the suddenly opened vista at the very edge of the volcano itself.

No wonder I forgot for those overflowing hours the errand on which I had come. No wonder that there entered into my scene-drugged mind no foreboding thoughts. No wonder, as the full view of Kilauea broke from the copse of ferns and ohelos on my left, that for the moment only the thrill of another picture of startling newness and strange beauty came over me.

The fascination of the volcano—the fascination of it, I say, I did not at that moment comprehend.

But then I was surfeited with sightseeing.

I turned to the chauffeur.

"Take me to the observation laboratory," I said.

It was perhaps a hundred yards farther, and but a few steps from the crater's rim; a long flat yellow frame structure, mostly of glass and wire screen, it impressed me, and remarkably fitting its purpose. A Japanese, in starchy white, bowed at the doorway.

"Meestah Whitcomb?" he queried with great display of teeth.

I nodded; and he hustled my bags away. I tipped my driver, a Portuguese, and followed.

"Thees a way, sah," hissed the Jap. And he lead me to the farthest room of the building, deposited my grips, shot up the blinds, and with another grin swept aside the curtain, and said:

"Mos' painstakin' view, iss not, Meestah Whitcomb?"

I nodded at his rather remarkable adjective—another bit of the strange country, I mused. Then I started—for as I leaned out of the window I found that it actually overhung the great hollow beneath. I drew back with heart beating wildly and palms pressing against the sill.

I caught the servant swiftly turning away in pretense at putting away my clothes—I saw the grin on his face.

"Whew!" I smiled. "Pretty deep right here."

He turned.

"Four hundred eighty feets, sah, Professor Rhodes say. An' ovah there"—he pointed to the bluffs at the right—"ovah there, Professor say eight hundred—straight jump."

"Whew," I said again, for I began to feel a bit perspiry after that first glance. "Under my feet."

"Floor ver' strong," said the Jap. "Professor Rhodes smile when he see it," he added ambiguously.

Then I recollect.

"But where is Professor Rhodes?" I asked quickly.

The Jap shrugged his shoulders, and showed his prominent teeth again.

"Halemaumau," he said, giving the native name—main crater, sir. Study."

"Oh," I said, and took another look out of the window. "Where is it?"

The Japanese pointed straight out to

where, in the basin that was beneath me, the shiny stove polish gray of the old lava flows coned up to a smoking eminence a short distance off.

"Oh—too far," said the Jap. "Couple miles, ver' hard on shoe—and Professor Rhodes be back lunch time."

"Two miles to the main fiery pit!" I cried. "Just over there?"

The little chap nodded.

"Air ver' clean," he explained. "Rock ver' hot, an' sharp where are break places, Professor Rhodes say me keep you here where he come lunch time, sah. Yes, sah."

I stayed.

So Rhodes was already hard at it. Scientific enthusiasm! Well, let him study, I'd take my own time—unless he drove me. And Harry Rhodes had a way about him that was driving, too—a personal force that impelled one to work as he willed, and when he willed, and where, and in what manner. That was one reason I liked the man. When "on the job," as he used to say, poor chap, he was "on the job"; cold, hard, matter of fact, determined to win out, going at his work in an everything-else-be-damned attitude that was simply inspiring. All his life, short but already full of achievement, he had sought, and believed only in, fact. He had come here to discover the facts about the volcano of Kilauea. I believed he would not leave until he had worked out these facts. I was not surprised that, instead of lingering here to greet me, he was out there where the smoke was rising, after facts.

And already I began to feel that I, too, must get out and to work.

CHAPTER II.

THE PIT OF EVERLASTING FIRE.

AT noon I heard a stamping at the door, and then in crisp hard tones, but full of friendly greeting:

"Hello, old man. Mighty glad to see you. What a great time you must have had! No circles under your eyes, plenty of healthy color, firm grip in your hand, quick movements, head up. Great! Great! Fit for work. And you'll have it. By

jinks, man, it's a great study, great study. You'll have work. Let's get some food in us, and then we'll be off. Glad you're so fit—need to be. Got heavy shoes?"

There you are. That was his way.

I grinned. The Jap began to fly about like a white shade. Evidently he knew Rhodes pretty well after these few short weeks. I looked fine, did I? And so could do work, eh? I suppose he would have had the same enthusiasm over a piece of machinery that came to him in good condition.

"Thanks," I said. "I have."

"You'll need 'em," he said. "Where the surface lava is cracked it's like broken glass—is broken glass. Fact!"

I smiled again. Fact.

"Your first trip," Rhodes snapped, as the Jap served, "we'll make a general round-up. Broad view at first is better. Did it myself. Later come details. Great work—you'll be mad over it. I am already in a little more than two weeks. Fact!"

Lord, thought I, he is going to lead me a merry race!

And he did. But how dearly was it won! And how appalling its finish! Had I known then, or felt—but that of course, is absurd. How can one know that a thing is to occur, and then set about to avert it, to thwart the will of fate? It is well we have no vision of the future. Our miseries are sufficient as they are, God knows.

But perhaps I sound pessimistic, gloomy. I should not, for after all it was a glorious thing, a splendid thing that Rhodes did at the finish—a thing that should, in the reflected glory it sheds on civilized man, make us who know, and perhaps you who read, better, whole-hearted, more optimistic.

Luncheon over, old-clothes donned, and we started down into the crater by way of a trail out in the precipitous wall below the observatory. And all the way down, and as we picked our way over the ancient flows in the basin below, Rhodes, in his jerky matter-of-fact sentences was giving me a general idea about the thing we were to study.

"Whole groups of islands are volcanic," he snapped. "Bubbles, blisters, on earth's

surface, shoved above sea. On this island two bubbles, Mauna Kea. Loa's dead, more or less—Kea, this one, still a bit hot. You'll see that," he added grimly. "Damn hot!"

"And smelly," I interpolated facetiously.

"Sulfur," he snapped without a smile. "To continue: Kea rises up twelve thousand feet—main crater on cone top, dead long ago—but this one broke out on the mountain's flank—like a boil. Big one though, Kilauea is—see for yourself. Take a lake the size of Manhattan Island, and let the bottom suddenly drop out of it so that the banks fall straight down from five hundred to eight hundred feet—let the muddy bottom be a hard and shiny slate gray, and appear to have flowed, or be flowing, in massy rounded molasseslike rolls, from a slightly raised place in the crater—let steam be rising at odd intervals about the muddy looking floor, and a cloud of blue sulfur fumes and whiter smoke be blowing as from a great conflagration in the hollow of the mounded crater—let a mist be falling, a strong breeze blowing, an all permeating odor combined of steam laundry and match factory be ever in your nostrils—let a feeling gradually grip you that you are treading on a mined field which may at any moment blow you to atoms or crack open and drop you into a sea of molten stone and living fire—let your senses suddenly comprehend that this is a work of living nature in the very act of earth change, and that over it man has not the slightest control—and you have Kilauea. God! It's magnificent!"

We reached the bottom at last, and began to pick our way over the crackling crust of brittle lava. Now and again a section of the stuff would tip beneath my foot, and my heart wildly pound.

But Rhodes would exclaim:

"No worries, old man. Nothing hot right here. Hell's a bit further on."

Yet a hundred paces along, he stopped and pointed to a bit of steam trailing in the breeze from a low break in the floor.

"Stuff flowing there," he said matter-of-factly.

I craned my neck and started for the place.

"Approach it from below!" cried Rhodes.

"But it will run right at me, then!" I remonstrated.

"You can dodge these little fellows. But if you get above, you might break through the crust, and lose a foot before you knew it was burned. Native did that a month ago—unpleasant, they say."

A little coldness seized me.

"You mean that above us here, under the crackly stuff on which we're treading, the liquid molten rock is lying."

He nodded.

"Fact," he said. "There's the main fiery pit—" He pointed ahead a mile or so to where the rise was craggily cut off and smoke was rising. "Natives call it the Pit of Everlasting Fire, Halemaumau. They've names for everything here you know—queer ducks. Well, up in there the lava level must be a hundred yards or more higher than we are here. Only the hardened crust around the pit holds it from getting us right now—from getting the whole country, I might just as well say. Why, if the thing took a notion to rise, it could flood half the island, and destroy—ugh! I don't like to think of that—with nothing, *nothing*, you know, to stop it—beyond man's power. "Huh!" He smiled belittlingly at the thought of man. "Huh! Little shrimp—man—insignificant atom."

I smiled my appreciation.

"But this little tongue of lava breaking out right here?" I hinted.

"Well, there are weak places, of course," Rhodes went on. "And of course the pressure of all that stuff above in the pit is terrific. So naturally some of it leaks through—creeps between old flows, you know—under enormous pressure. See!" He pointed at a little glowing tongue that suddenly streamed from under the crust to our left. "There's a bit forced out. But see it turn gray—hardened almost at once. Watch it, now—and you'll see the hardened tip lift a little, and out the molten stuff will run again."

It so happened, and weirdly enough. Then the surface of that tiny flow hardened; we waited a few moments; then as before, the tip of this last flow raised ever

so little, and out was forced another fiery trickle.

I gasped.

"It's alive!" I exclaimed.

Rhodes smiled mockingly.

"Yes, the natives say that. They have legends, you know. Superstitious rot!"

"But do these little flows take place throughout all the older stuff?" I queried. He nodded.

"They are continually raising the bottom of the crater. It may be that the very spot you stand on will to-morrow be covered a couple feet—"

I jumped.

"Let's move on," I said. "The stuff is alive."

"You're as bad as the Kanakas," smiled Rhodes. "Remember you're here to get facts, not to go batty over a bit of hot stone being alive."

"I don't blame 'em," I grunted, as we turned aside to clear another tricklet of smoking, glowy stuff that seemed to hurriedly run out to meet us.

"Who?" said Rhodes.

"The natives," I answered.

Then Rhodes stated another fact.

"You're a fool!" he snapped, and strode on.

Submissively I followed.

But I smiled within myself. Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist, said I to myself, will let nothing prevent him from getting the facts about Kilauea. And nothing I added soberly, can prevent him from learning all that mere humans might learn.

There is always a place, admittedly, where man comes against a wall, a vast wall, opaque, impenetrable, unsurmountable, against which he may fling himself until exhausted and yet which, still stubbornly sphinxlike, will answer his questions—not. I felt that Rhodes would glean all he could, all man could, until he reached this wall. Then, for the man was built that way, he would scan the wall from afar, measure it with wisdom's eye, close up to it and minutely search every detail; then, because he wanted fact and only fact, he would say, "I have come to the end of my labors. There is nothing farther that I can pick apart and set aside

and say: This is fact. Therefore, my good friend, let us pack up our notes, our photographs, our paraphernalia, and hie us back to the good old coast where we can, at leisure, write the book the university so madly craves—a book of facts." Then he might add, for he differed not from the rest of our kind: "Let some fool old graybeard there theorize—we'll get the facts."

Again I smiled to myself as I slipped and stumbled over the crackling surface. Rhodes was practicality itself—I a fool.

Yet I argued, I was right where I said that I didn't blame the natives for their superstition. That vast wall against which we would finally come was simply one of a series, an infinite series. The wall against which the Kanakas came was simply one earlier in the series. We had solved the *Open Sesame* to its mystery, had penetrated it and trod the ground betwixt it and that wall that finally would defeat us, with eagerness, certainty, wisdom. To them, what lay beyond the wall at which their knowledge of fact ended was blackness, mystery, gods—to us, because we were secure in deeper sight, this blackness, mystery, and talk of gods was superstition. They did not conceive, perhaps, of other walls beyond our wall. To them all that could possibly be beyond theirs was blackness, mystery, gods—but to us, what lay beyond our wall we smugly said was yet unsolved nature, and we let our graybeards build fanciful theories. The natives conjured up ghosts and gods and pulled off each other's heads to prove a favorite's peculiar powers. The graybeards conjectured over heat and pressures, and plucked each others whiskers to prove their own particular principles.

A difference not of kind but of degree.

And even Rhodes had said that we were to note fact and fact only.

"Well," said I to myself, as we puffed up the steeper slope to the main fiery pit, "just what will he do when he comes to his wall. He said all he wanted was fact—let the philosophers at the university theorize." As I looked about me at the vastness of the arena of steaming heat to the center of which we, little atoms, walked

so boldly confident, I wondered if Rhodes would hold to his word; just get facts—or would he then try to go beyond? And if he tried to penetrate *his* wall—what then?

Perhaps it is fortunate that man has not the gift of prescience. I am glad, with such thought running through my mind, that I had not.

As we slipped and crunched upward, a deep gurgling and heavy puffing struck my ear. And at the same time came a shrill chorus of excited voices. A half dozen tourists at the pit's brink beckoned to us to hurry.

We leaped on, and in a moment more stood with them.

CHAPTER III.

MME. PELE'S HAIR.

THREE are two visions of Halemaumau that I will ever carry with me—and would that they were but one! The first view I had of the fiery pit is one, the last view is the other. The first, a vista of weird, thrilling, fascination. The last—of hellish horror. God, had I but dreamed it! Had I but—but the thing is done, and naught is left but to tell it—naught but to tell it all.

My first impression was of craggy, jagged, out-reaching jaws, a wide opened mouth of heated-hazed gray and livid red, a leaping, pulsing, eager tongue in the very center—madly opened wide and spewing at the heavens, and, in a sobbing thwarted voice, cursing God—a thing in and of itself, alive, terrible, malevolent.

My second impression—I turned to Rhodes.

"A bit of hell, itself," I muttered.

There was no answer.

Rhodes, hands behind his back, was gazing fascinatedly at the leaping turmoil of lava in the swirling pool of molten rock at our feet. His face was tense, his eyes burning with a heat that was second only to the crater itself. I thrilled a bit—if I could only feel in myself but a portion of his scientific ardor!

I nudged him.

"As if beneath that pool," I said, "some monster ogre was chained in everlasting torment, his writhings causing those slow currents beneath the cliffs, his choking breath the convulsive leaping of the molten lava, his desperate sobbing the grumbling of the stuff and the trembling of the rock beneath our feet."

Rhodes jerked awake.

"Perhaps there is," he said in a low voice.

For a fraction of a second I took my eyes off the pit of fire. This much from Rhodes—even in fun?

"Well," I said, "that is a concession to native superstition, and"—I could not help but add—"to a fool."

A bit irritable, I fancied, my good friend shook himself.

"Every day for almost three weeks past," he said, "three hours each day, I have watched the scene before us. I have seen the whole pool silent, heavy, gray surfaced and wrinkled slightly—as elephant hide in tough appearance, as a pot of molten lead in color and calmly latent possibilities—gray, placid, but hot; only at the edges beneath the cliffs continually and redly lapping, lapping, hungry for the rock on which it feeds.

"And then in a moment a split appears, great sections of the congealed surface swing apart, the red molten stuff beneath, touching the air, leaps and hisses and bellows, the whole pit becomes alive, great blocks of the cliffs slide in, leap in, eagerly throw themselves in—and the place does become even as the natives call it, Halemaumau, the Pit of Everlasting Fire. Three weeks of it, I've seen. And the natives sacrifice to it." Here his face hardened and his hands clenched. "Fools! As if man—" Then he shrugged his shoulders again. And stared to the left, where the gray, hardened surface was slowly entering a glaring, puffing hollow beneath the cliff—and disappearing in its maw.

Then suddenly Rhodes chuckled.

"Look at 'em," he said nodding to the tourists, who had made their way to a low level of hardened lava to our right. "That is what I call practical—broiling ham over a crack in the surface."

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Not possible?" he ran on. "Look beneath you."

I did, and confess to another real thrill. For not three feet below the surface the fissure in the lava was glaring red. I stepped aside a bit hastily—nearer to the crater's edge.

Rhodes chuckled again—then his face went white—and tightened in horror.

"This way," he cried hoarsely. "Jump! Jump!"

Needless to say I leaped straight over the red hot crack that I had just avoided. Rhodes, still white and tense, seized my arm and ran me a dozen paces to one side. And as we scrambled on, a rending crash came from behind us, a giant *pllopping* splash followed.

And when I turned to look, the entire ledge on which we had been standing had disappeared and the pool of molten rock was in turmoil. My knees weakly deposited me onto the ground, and my head swam.

Rhodes's hand trembled as he, sitting also, and breathing heavily, placed it on my shoulder. His smile was rather forced, I imagine, when he said:

"Well, old man, your tortured ogre nearly got you that time, didn't he?"

I nodded quietly, jerkily.

"Not a pleasant way of going, I imagine," he ran on a little smoother. "I never did fancy so hot an end. Rather glad we noticed the ham broilers—"

I looked up, a bit anxiously.

"Oh, they never even heard it," he said. "But if they hadn't been playing there I might not have looked at the crack beneath our feet, might not have seen it slowly widen, might not have jumped with you in time, you see? Tourist boasting—I did it too—over a crack!"—probably saved us from a rather unpleasant end."

I pressed his hand.

"It's not a joke," I murmured. "Thanks."

He grinned, but returned the pressure.

"No joke—fact! But it did almost get you— Beware what you say of Kilauea. Now let's go over to the second crater. Three little ones now, you know." He

hurried on, seemingly quite over his emotion. "All the stuff in sight, even the crust we're standing on, is new flow of the last four months—used to be one great pit, now three—fact!"

So was the man changed again. Fact, fact, fact—he adored fact. And yet—there was that on his face as he stared at the lapping, fiery rock that seemed to say:

"Yes, this whole thing is a single great fact; it is, it exists, it is fact. But behind it all—well, I do wonder now what is hidden there. Something—it fascinates—fascinates." That is what his face, his glowing eyes, had seemed to say. And recalling, I wondered if something were changing in the basic character of my good friend, Harrison Rhodes, volcanologist. Whether, after all, he were not wondering what lay beyond his wall—whether, after all he was charmed only by—fact.

The days passed; we photographed, took notes, tested for temperature, for the chemistry of the lava, the fumes, the steam. We observed by day, by night—recorded the movement of the flows, the varying heights which the pools in the crater caldrons reached, the coincident amounts of vapor and smoke and seismic action.

Rhodes was incessantly "on the job." He never wearied. He never seemed to fear. He was obsessed with scientific fervor. He must have facts. He took chances, risked horrible death a dozen times a day, laughed when I remonstrated, when I recalled to him our narrow escape of my first day at the crater—boasted that nothing could get him—and on it all waxed fat.

Then one day came a package of books from Honolulu. I was glad, for I anticipated an evening of enjoyment.

But, before I had a chance to mention the thing to him, Rhodes had Azaki carry it into his bedroom, unopened. He did this almost secretly, as though he thought that I might see the books—and laugh.

I wondered at this—for we shared all our pleasures and difficulties together, even as we had done when students in the university for which we now labored.

I wondered too, as each day we made our observations at the fiery pit of Hale-

maumau, why Rhodes had at times those fits of seeming abstraction, why he would stand and gaze so fascinatedly at the teeming stuff within—stand thus when our notes of that particular formation or phenomenon were already quite complete.

He would watch the stuff as the surface spiraled about, as the gray sections of it would tip and up-endedly slide the one beneath the other, as great chunks of cliff would thunderingly fall into the lava with a ponderous splashing and upheaval of the heavy liquid, as fountains of liquid fire would dance with clumsy grace and fantasy—would watch it as though dazed by its vastness, as though hypnotized by its constant variation.

Then one day as we were taking motion pictures of a particularly beautiful play of lava, I saw his eyes eagerly scanning the formation on which he stood. And suddenly he stepped closer to the crater, stooped, and scooped up something from the ground.

He held out his hand to me, one finger bleeding plentifully—and in the palm was a fluffy bit of hairlike material, soft as spun glass, and really the same stuff spun by the winds playing on the spurting lava.

"Pele's hair," he said with a smile.

I nodded.

"Yes," I said, "another pretty native superstition. And you've cut yourself on the sharp lava break—that's a blood sacrifice for the hair, I should say, eh?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned away. I watched him from the tail of my eye. He did not toss the soft stuff to the winds, but surreptitiously stowed it in an envelope. Playing with me, eh, I smiled to myself? Or seized wth a sudden taste for curio-saving? Or—what else might it be?

Why this growing secrecy—if indeed it were secrecy at all?

That night I found one of the new books on the spreading porch where he had undoubtedly forgotten it. I picked it up, and read the title.

It was: "Native Hawaiian Superstitions." The author I have forgotten.

I laid it in my hand, and it opened naturally and easily at a chapter labeled:

"Legends of Kilauea." And a little further along came the story of Mme. Pele, the goddess of fire, and of native sacrificial feasts in her honor on the crater's crumbling edge.

So that was what Rhodes was reading. I had heard of such books. I knew the Kanakas had such tales, such folk-lore. Rhodes knew that I knew this too. Then why, I pondered, this secretiveness? Why did he not share the books with me? Was it perhaps that he didn't wish to distract me from the work at hand—gathering facts? Was it that he knew it was utter nonsense, and so was a little ashamed that I find him immersed in such literature after all his outbursts regarding his obsession for the pursuit of fact and his mocking of those who, halted at their wail, according to their lights, conjure up spirits or conjecture as to principles?

Or was it something else?

Why had he been so fascinated to-day in that little tangle of Mme. Pele's hair, when the stuff was in every nook and cranny near the crater, and we had seen it every visit we had made?

Why were his observations of the changes in the pit made now with so much more of the fanatic than the cool, hard-headed, practical-minded, only-fact-believing man of exact science that heretofore he had been?

Why had he not accepted my little joke about blood sacrifice when I noticed his finger bleed from the cut made by the newly broken lava edge?

He hadn't. He hadn't even smiled. He had simply turned away, and tucked that bit of volcanic spun glass in his pocket.

And that evening when he came in, I having left the crater earlier in the day in order to develop some film in which I was particularly interested, I mentioned jokingly, testingly, I had better say, these books.

It was natural for me to do this, too, for no sooner was the dinner over and our cigars lit, than he started for his own room.

As his hand touched the door knob, I opened the question.

"Pretty interesting stuff for a practical

man whose business it is to set down fact," I hinted.

He paused—his face a study.

"You mean—have seen—" he then said a bit hotly, chin lifted.

"I didn't spy, Harry, old man," I said.

"But why the secrecy—why all the—"

He closed the door, and dropped into a seat at my side, whence through the great glass windows he could view the fast dimming crater. He seemed to be pondering over just how to explain himself, and put his action into the right light. His cigar smoke drifted idly for several minutes, before he spoke. And finally when he did vouchsafe a further answer, his voice was calm, but his words uncertain, as if he himself were not sure of himself, were not quite clear in his own mind.

"I don't know," he said. "I confess it—I don't know why I did it. I sent for the books on—well, on impulse. And I found, when they came at last, that I was a bit fussed, you know—wondering what you would say."

I raised my brows.

"Was there any reason why I shouldn't think it quite natural that you read that type of book—dealing with the subject that is our present study—even though only native superstition?"

He glanced at me—and I read surprise in his quick eye, and a little mortification as well.

"Well," he said slowly, "you know I detest fanciful—"

"Yes," I interrupted quickly, "you did detest such stuff."

At that his face hardened slightly. Then he said shortly:

"The things interest me—rest me. And it is possible, is it not, that even native folk-lore may shed some light on ancient volcanic phenomena here. Legends originate in *something*—some physical, concrete action or object of nature, do they not?"

I had to acknowledge that they did. But nevertheless, I could see clearly enough from his talk, his actions, the suspicious and furtive look in his eye, that he had hidden these books from me for more reason than he would acknowledge. And as I sat and

the blue smoke of my cigar mingled in the ensuing silence with that from his, I saw him again as he stood a few days before in rapt fascination on the crater's edge—I saw again the strange look that was on him as he held up that suddenly plucked fluff of Mme. Pele's hair.

The first days of my stay with him he had not acted thus. Why did he now?

Surely, tourists enough had I seen gazing enraptured, even dazed, into the seething, glowing crater, their eyes reflecting the reds and vermillion of its fires, their cheeks afire with the heat. All who came to see Kilaeua did thus; then, awestruck, inspired, perhaps a bit frightened and dreaming of a cleaner, friendlier life during the rest of their days, they picked up their bits of lava, their envelopes full of Mme. Pele's hair, burned the edges of their souvenir post cards in the red hot fissures, and went their way.

But Rhodes—his case was different. His was not to be expected. His was unique.

And why?

As I dreamed thus there came a knock on the door.

I instructed Azaki as he came through the room to answer it.

"Wait!" said Rhodes quickly, "I think I know who it was."

And he opened the door himself and stepped outside.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RUMBLING OF THE PIT.

I CONFESS that I listened intently, and unashamed of my eavesdropping.

From the soft gutturals of the strangers, for I had seen at least three forms standing in the gathering darkness outside, I knew them to be natives. And I concluded at once that they were bringing specimens to us—possibly of a whiter-colored lava formation that was found in one of the olden craters, long since quiet.

Yet when, after the conversation had continued for at least five minutes, Rhodes gravely and with only a silent nod to me came in, took his hat, and left again, I began to wonder what his errand might be.

Rapidly on the hard roadway the echo of their footsteps retreated—and I was left alone with my cigar and my reverie.

Heretofore, in all our expeditions—and Rhodes and I had been to Java, to the Aleutian Islands, to Popocatepetl in Mexico, to Vesuvius in Italy, and Etna in the island of Sicily, in our pursuit of facts about volcanic action—Rhodes had been in all things my confidant, and I his. Personal matters we discussed with the openness of full and trusting friendship; business matters with the confidence of a friend's suggestion and aid; professional matters with the free give and take, acceptance or mockery, construction or sarcastic destruction, of two men who had studied the same branch of geology and shared the same discoveries, the same defeats, and who held the same ambitions, for a full score of years.

And yet here, but why I could not for the life of me see, Rhodes chose to hold aloof, chose other books than those we might together enjoy, chose other thoughts than those he might communicate to me, chose other companions than myself for an untimely and secretive jaunt away from the laboratory. Leaving me, his lifelong partner in all he did and was, alone.

With my cigar dropping its ashes unheeded, I stared out at the crater which now, with the great glow in the clouds above the Pit of Everlasting Fire where dwelt Mme. Pele, and with the living rubies dotted about the great basin where the little tongues of lava continually broke up the open, was a veritable bivouac ground of a mighty army. The scene was beautiful, and I confess, despite its natural explanation, awesome. And I shrugged my shoulders as I thought of those books on native superstition. Who, viewing such a vast example of nature's mightiness, could blame the natives for their beliefs. Who, seeing that gleam from the fiery pit, could mock the native when he declared that pit to be under the control of Mme. Pele, goddess of fire—particularly when that mysterious and all-powerful superwoman's hair lay in every nook and cranny near the pit itself. I smiled. What these simple, spirit-loving, spirit-fearing folk would not conjure

up in answer to their questions of the unknown!

By ten o'clock Rhodes had not returned, and, a bit disgusted, I told Azaki to go to bed and turned in myself.

In the morning, at breakfast, Rhodes seemed a bit sheepish, and hung his head as though he felt his truancy.

Then, with the meal half over, he suddenly burst out:

"Poor fellows, poor chaps—they—they believe—believe."

I glanced up questioningly.

Harrison flashed red as the strawberries on his plate.

"Believe, eh?" I said a bit coldly.

He puttered with his spoon.

"Came to get me last night—me"—he went on hastily, yet, it appeared to me as though to confirm his own thought—"me, the most practical man in the world—whose sole ambition is to discover and make note of the fact—get me to go to one of their infer—I should say—ungodly native luaus in honor of Mme. Pele. Imagine"—he looked up but his eyes were anywhere but on mine—"imagine that—me—at a native feast, eating seaweed, and unsinged chicken, and raw pork liver, and slimy poi—in honor of a Kanaka goddess. Ye gods!"

He puttered once more at his berries.

"You left here a bit hurriedly, Harry," I said.

He hastened to answer—face still red.

"They wanted me to hurry—pretty far to go—and the kahuna said there's a prophecy or something that there's to be an eruption, a violent one, that 'll cover the whole island very soon; so they wanted me. Pele has said it, they declare. Absolutely sure about it. Can you imagine that? And getting me—me, a man of fact, mind you—fact and cold, hard, science—to go to their horrible feed and—well, and help them—help stop that awful thing that's prophesied."

"Help them!" I cried. Then, with I don't know what underlying thought forcing my words: "Think you can?" I questioned with a bit of scorn in my voice.

His answer was astonishing.

"God knows!" he said with great revo-

rence—then abruptly put his napkin down and left the table.

All that day he avoided me.

And that evening, again, he disappeared.

And so for a week at least each day the same thing occurred.

Our conversations were limited to bare necessity. His attitude, do not mistake me, was not unfriendly—but simply aloof. He acted as though a bit ashamed, a bit abstracted, a bit frightened of possible consequences of I knew not what—a bit mysterious, a bit secretive. He acted as he had never acted before. Two months ago he was himself, Harrison Rhodes—now, after two months' intimate acquaintance with the volcano, he was another man—another being, I might say.

On the evening of the eighth day, however, my friend did not as usual retire to his room, nor did the natives come to the door and call him away.

Instead, he sat himself down, humming softly; and picked up one of his books and idly fingered it.

Then he said, out of a clear sky:

"Well, old man, you'll admit, after what you've seen of the fiery pit, that if there isn't a goddess of fire, there ought to be one."

I looked up. His face was unclouded, clear. This, I instantly concluded, was more like my friend's real self.

"Absolutely!" I affirmed enthusiasti-

ally, and waited for him to go on.

But he did not—simply sat down and puffed away at his cigar and turned the leaves of his book.

And at perhaps ten he arose, stretched himself, smiled warmly, shamefacedly, as though in confession and plea for forgiveness, and went off to bed. And I, after a glance at the fire-dotted abyss below us, retired too.

I was awakened shortly by a slight trembling of my bed—as though some giant hand was gently shaking it. I sat up in the darkness, and heard a muffled exclamation from the next room as I did so. My bed trembled again, and the timbers of the building creaked protestingly—and I knew at once—an earthquake—a good one, and

this house on the very edge of that dizzy gulf!

Even as I leaped from my bed, the door opened, and the giant, pajamaed figure of Rhodes stepped in.

His voice was hollow as he spoke—and his words unbelievable.

"Even as it was prophesied," said he, "it has come to be—Mme. Pele awakens."

A shot of cold thrilled my spine. Was the man suddenly mad? Or was the whole thing a vast hoax he had contrived to relieve the monotony of our study. Should I rush him, knock him down, and drag him out of the house before another earthquake shock should precipitate us both into the hungry abyss below—or should I pass the thing off as a joke.

I decided on the latter.

"Nonsense!" I cried. "Get some clothes on and let's get off the edge before we're tumbled in."

His white face shook negatively.

"The kahuna said it," he went on, "at that first feast he foretold it—Mme. Pele awakens."

"Get shoes on, anyway—snap into 'em," I ordered.

He came over and put a hand on my shoulder—I winced at its chilly touch. The scene was weird enough—what with the drizzle outside, the creak of the house, the pale ghost of this madman beside me, the talk of fire goddesses, and all about us tinged with the crimson reflection from the glare of the eternal fires without. Rhodes patted my shoulder reassuringly.

"Don't worry, old fellow," he said soothingly. "Nothing will happen to us—at least"—here he hesitated, and I saw that his eyes sought Halemaumau, above which the clouds were as of blood—"at least," he repeated—"not yet."

Another rumbling shook the building. The hand on my shoulder gave a spasmodic clutch.

"What the devil do you know about it?" I cried. "Come, now, you've got to go."

He did not resist. And once outside, my own fear left me, and I confess I felt the complete fool that not so long ago Rhodes had called me. We waited in the silence for half an hour or more. Then, following

the example of the hastily clad guests we could see on the hotel lawn, we turned back to our rooms.

At his door Rhodes seized my arm again.

"Forgive me, old man," he said quietly, sanely. "I—I must have been dreaming—and those kahunas are so damn impressive when they prophesy—I admit it—must have had me going." Then he nodded toward the crater. "I don't see that the shock has changed things any over there, do you?"

Through the glass I could see no increase or decrease in the palpitating glow above the fiery pit.

"Not yet!" I said shortly.

Rhodes's hand still held me. "Not offended, old fellow, are you?" he asked.

"See you in the morning," I answered, and left him.

I could hear him sigh deeply as he entered his own room. And later, as I lay awake, unable to sleep as yet, I could hear him tossing and muttering on his bed, and wondered what was so troubling his mind. Was the man a bit crazed by his strenuous concentration over the gathering of fact, or was the various and vast superstitious lore of Kilauea overpowering his scientific faith, and slowly making him, too, as confident in the belief in, and worship of, Mme. Pele, as any native of these islands? Or, after all, was it all a hoax—was he simply, by strenuous means, trying to have a little sport with me?

Toward dawn came another knocking on the door, and a thump from Rhodes's room. But hushed voices immediately following, told me there was no need for me to arise. The natives again! Yet this time my friend did not leave with them, but shortly the door closed, and I heard him retire once more.

CHAPTER V.

TONGUES OF FIRE.

AT the fiery pit that day were fair a hundred natives.

"Come to make sacrifice," nodded Rhodes, a lot more communicative than lately.

"To their gods?" I asked, to draw him out.

"To Mme. Pele, goddess of fire," he said. "Those fellows last night came to ask me if it would be all right."

I stared.

"Came to ask *you*? What do they think you are—a kahuna?"

He shrugged his shoulders and looked away.

"Hardly that, I think. But they know I study the thing, and so—" He made an expressive gesture.

"Humph!" I grunted, eying him—"I study it, too—they don't—"

He wheeled.

"Perhaps," he said shortly—"perhaps I understood them better."

"Harry!" I cried then, "do you mean to say that you believe all this bally rot about this thing being alive, and all that?"

I was resolved to get at the root of things at last.

When he turned again to answer me his eyes were aglow. But instead of the flood of biting words I had expected, came the following enthusiastic outburst:

"Why, man, man!" he cried, flinging his arms out wide, "it *is* alive! It's the good old mother earth alive. Form-changing mother nature, struggling to exert her power, and in the struggle shaking the very earth as she did last night. Can't you see, man, that this living fire is indeed the living earth? Why the very spirit of the universe is fire—the very heavens are alight with it at night—the infinitesimal bit of cosmic dust which we inhabit owes its life to its congenial warmth. Fire? God, it's man's salvation. The structure of all our civilization is built on fire, even as is the ground we stand on at this moment. Man is man, dominant, thinking, dextrous, because of fire. Alive, you ask? Alive? You bet this old Kilauea is alive—as alive as you and I—and its spirit is as animate.

"Good old Mme. Pele"—here he choked and his face paled, and he added in a lower tone—"and cursed old Mme. Pele! The goddess of fire! Yes—good, for she warms our bodies—evil, for she feeds upon our souls. God! old man, if you but understood her as do I. These last days"—

his voice broke again, then—"and Pele, Mme. Pele, the living earth rising and falling, leaping playfully, storming in diabolic rage; gay, dull, beautiful in glowing color, now hideously red, mouthing at these walls that hold it in from the destruction it might do man—the force, the living, vibrant force of it—seeking outlet with little fingers of it eagerly breaking into the sunshine and freedom through every long-sought weakness in the barrier the outside cold throws over it; great flows of it now and again seething over the crater's mammoth lip and seeking to find far fields; or baffled, falling deep, deep, deep back into the unfathomed depths of Halemaumau, back to the comforting bosom of Mme. Pele, back for fiery food, and new vigor, and greater reenforcement for the next vast attempt. Alive, man? Alive? And you can call it bally rot, what these wise old natives think—what they believe. I tell you, friend of mine, that had we, too, dwelt as long as they beneath the glow of Kilauea, beneath the rule of Mme. Pele, we, too, might hold some strange beliefs.

"Look below you at those natives—even now they make sacrifice to Pele, for last night she made her power felt; last night came her warning even as the kahuna declared it would, even as the kahuna swore she had told him as he slept—warning that she was about to rise, to summon all her fires, all her terrors, and all her diabolical hosts of hissing gas, and liquid flame, and vast torturing floods of the molten flesh and bone of earth, and sweep with godlike avenging power over the fair lands and villages and cities below, that once more can she say: 'Behold, how little is man; what conceit hath he in the puny forces he controls; what pride in the puerile destruction he makes in far countries; how vain are the intricate labors with which he builds in this—while I, with but a single day of silent use of fire, can destroy a civilization, can erect a new land.' Thus did the kahuna declare Mme. Pele had spoken in his ear, my friend—and thus it may well be."

Rhodes paused, breathless.

I stared at him in disbelief—then turned to the worshippers.

The natives, perhaps a hundred strong, were gathered on the windward side of the fiery pit in a curved line not a dozen feet from the sharp, cut edge of the crater. The lava pool was now within as many feet, too, of the brink, and was in slow motion, the leathery, heat-hazed, surface lead colored, heaving gently, corrugatingly and folding, as it spiraled below the cliffs. None of the molten fluid was visible save where the tough scum met these jaggedly rising walls, and there, as usual, the liquid lava constantly and hungrily lapped, lapped at the crumbling rock, bit off huge chunks of it, swallowed them bodily and lapped, lapped, lapped, and mouthed and chewed for more—insatiable was Pele's appetite.

The stuff *was* alive!

A sudden chanting arose from the group of worshipers, and with the rhythm of the song their bodies moved in unison. One old fellow who seemed to be the leader tore off all his clothing but a cincture about the loins, and led the chanting and the dance. Faster and faster the time arose, wilder and wilder the antics and gyrations of the dancers became, until finally they went suddenly into frenzy.

I heard Rhodes, gazing spellbound beside me, gasp as the madness increased.

And when the leader seized the pile of his clothing and advanced to the very lip of the crater's maw, stood there a moment with eyes upcast, then threw the lot of it into the mass beneath him, my companion muttered:

"Good old kahuna. That 'll help—that 'll help."

And he pointed to the natives, who by now were all casting into the mouth of the pit small articles they valued—seed chains, poa pots, metal rings, and ornaments saved from the old days of the whaler settlements. I gripped Rhodes's arm.

"Is it sacrifice?" I whispered.

"To Pele!" he whispered breathlessly—"to Mme. Pele. That kahuna has brought them here—the prophecy, the earthquake." My friend paused a moment, then muttered: "God! If I only could help—could stop the trouble—could prevent—"

He seized my arm convulsively.

"Look—look, man, for God's sake—the pit—the pit!"

I turned from the natives—and froze stiffly. For the level of the lava had risen half-way to the jagged crust of the verge—and before my eyes, with a silent menace that was diabolical, was swiftly rising still—but a few scant feet and the margin would be reached and the fiery stuff rush over upon us.

For a space I stared, hypnotized.

Death in the most horrible form confronted us, for the crusted lip of the crater was, but for a few jagged bluffs, the highest part of the volcano. Should that steadily rising mass of molten fire reach the lip no power of man's could prevent us and those simple worshipers from falling its victims. I looked about me, and dimly heard Rhodes shouting to the Kanakas, and saw him motoring desperately for them to run back while the chance for life still remained.

They, too, seemed as dazed as I at the sudden rise of the lava, hypnotized by the terrible menace of its motion.

The kahuna, by his frantic gesticulation, was evidently exhorting them to stay; and he seized treasures from the heap before him and cast them into the mass to appease the angry spirit of Kilauea. Rhodes continued to wildly wave, and his voice was already hoarse from pleading with them to retreat. Then, suddenly, like sheep, they bolted for the little ridge by which they had come—claring not to cross the slightly lower swale toward us.

They were safe, and I breathed a sigh of relief and turned to seek our own retreat. Then I heard a cry that seemed racked from the souls of men—and I turned about again.

Rhodes, beside me, pale as death, exclaimed harshly:

"They're cut off—a flow has broken over the edge just beyond that turn—they'll have to risk it this way!"

And then he shouted again—and by now the level of the stuff was lapping at the very rim, and our clothes beginning to smoke.

"This way—this way!" he cried. "Your only chance—this—" And then he interjected some words in the Hawaiian tongue of which I knew nothing, and had

never known him to know anything before. Then: "Cross the low place—for God's sake, don't hesitate—come—*come!* Ah, God, it's too late—too late!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAP OF PELE.

IT was, indeed, too late. For even as the flock was teetering in hesitation, the lip was reached, and a wild, eager, seething mass hissed triumphantly over the swale.

A shivering wail arose. The natives were cut off on both sides by spreading rivers of molten rock, gorgeous glowing streams which, the veritable arms and fingers of Mme. Pele herself, sought out every nook, every crevice, every fissure. As we stood, half-dazed, the mass in the pit arose higher and higher, and the flood over the rim became deeper and widened hungrily, and the living mass of it arose about the little islet of higher lava on which the little group of erstwhile worshipers pitifully huddled.

The kahuna, his back to the creeping death, still exhorted his flock to pray, to sacrifice. Wildly he shouted, frantically, he tore off chains from his flock, hair ornaments, clothing, and cast them into the seething torrent. Vainly he raised his arms to the crater and cried out to Pele to hold back the horror that crept upon them, that so eagerly devoured with flaming tongues the sacrifices they had made, to stay the torture that even now the half-naked assemblage was beginning to feel.

A curse gritted at my side, and Rhodes megaphoned his hands and pleaded frantically with them.

"Sacrifice, you fools!" he cried. "All—all—all you have—you, there, with that purse in your hand—throw it to Pele—throw it to Pele! Fools, is it worth more than your life? Will you burn in that hell of fire before you give that money? Sacrifice—and Pele will hear your prayers—give—*give—give—all—all!*"

Madly the Kanakas stripped. Great chunks of the cliff beside them fell off, eaten away by the blazing flood, and floated like islands on the rushing stream. A great hissing geyser of sulfur smoke and lava

leaped a hundred feet in the air from the center of the crater. The solid crust began to tremble. The natives fell on their knees on the smoking ground.

"Pele! Pele! Pele!"

Rhodes, pale, seized me. His breath came more quietly. He was as death itself.

"There is but one way," he cried to me, "but one way—Pele must be appeased and those fools—"

I turned on him.

"We cannot stop that flood. Let's get out over that point while we can. God help them—no man can now!" I cried.

Rhodes's face set.

"No man can save them," he repeated. "You are right. Nō man can—but a god could, or a *goddess*—and Pele, Mme. Pele"—he turned once more to the natives—"Give what you have left!" he cried. "All—all—sacrifice—or it will be too late."

He turned on me savagely.

"There is one way left to save them," he muttered. "Lead on—I'll follow you. One way!" he cried. "And the fools see it not!" He gritted his teeth. "Nor will I tell them, for I see now it is for me to do. The kahuna said it when he told us of Pele's talk. One way—"

His voice died away behind me, though I could hear the gritting and scraping of his heavy boots on the crust over which our path to safety lay.

A mighty wailing arose as we left, and I covered my ears with my hands to keep it out.

Then I cried out once more:

"Hurry, hurry, man, hurry—the stuff is higher and higher—and we must cross."

There was no answer. I turned.

Rhodes was not following me.

He was rapidly making his way up a steep incline that led to the highest crag overhanging the fiery pit—a mass of hardened lava that arose straight forty feet above the sea of liquid fire in which Pele dwelled. At the very tip, with his feet at the brink itself, he paused—his coat and hair waving in the seaward breeze, his profile bending toward the center of the mass, toward the vast geyserlike eruption that gracefully, ponderously, and menacingly diabolic, danced in the center.

A full minute Harrison Rhodes, man of hard science and cold fact, stood there, arms hanging naturally, head slightly bent, figure erect. Then he stretched out his arms toward that playing fountain of molten stone.

"Pele!" he cried clearly, simply. "Pele—accept a final sacrifice—I am coming. Take me, and withhold your anger, Pele—I am yours."

And he forthwith flung himself from the crag—flung himself, and hung suspended in mid air a moment even as does an expert diver. Then down, down—

Involuntarily I started for him, hands outstretched—to help to stop him. Then involuntarily, too, and mercifully, my eyes closed, and I fell upon my knees with my head buried in my hands.

How long I thus remained I do not know. Yet when I stumbled back to that same crag in a sobbing effort to see if something might not be done about my friend, a sight struck my eyes that has caused me to wonder much since as to the exact meaning of Harrison Rhodes's faith.

(The end.)

The Guardian of the Gate

by L. Patrick Greene

SITUTA was a misfit. In no way did he share the mighty heritage of his people, the Matabele. His puny, undersized body, grotesquely supported by thin, bowed legs, was an object of derision among the people of his kraal.

For the flow had ceased, the playing fountain had fallen, and the level of the lava, now once more gray and leather surfaced, had fallen to a vast and dizzy depth—the glowing lake of fire had retreated—the crater was now simply a deep well of vast size—and, for the time at least, harmless.

And when I looked across to the islet on which were marooned the Kanakas, the turbulent stream of liquid fire had already crusted over, the natives were singing once more; and though to me the song sounded more like the funeral dirge of my good friend, I learned afterward that it was in praise of and thanksgiving to the goddess of fire, to Mme. Pele—who had stayed her hand in time and saved their lives.

I blindly found my way back to the hotel. And the first remark of the persons there was, how badly my trouser knees were scorched.

"Had I perhaps been worshiping Mme. Pele?" they asked.

And then I told them of the thing my friend had done.



In sterner days, when his people knew no code save that of the survival of the fittest, Situta would never have reached the age of manhood; death by strangulation would have been his portion. Death by strangulation—"for no blood must be

shed, look ye, lest the scent of it be an offense to the nostrils of the great spirits. And may Inkoosikaas, the queen of the heavens, keep ever this one's soul from returning to us." But his people had grown soft with the fruits of victory; also the white men had passed certain womanish laws, and Situta lived to pray often for the death that was denied him.

Unable to join the young men in their strenuous sports, slow to follow the spoor, Situta, though of an age, was unmarried. The maidens scorned him for the weak thing he was, and because he had inherited no wealth and lacked the ability to procure cattle.

He occupied an old, dilapidated hut that had been discarded by his father's oldest wife. It was always in this fashion that he secured the wherewithal to satisfy the hunger that was ever gnawing at his vitals —by taking to himself what others had cast away. He was an outcast, shunned by the young men, or at best contumuously tolerated, forced to do the work of maidens in payment for the food that was grudgingly given him.

Yet the soul of Situta was the soul of a mighty warrior, and he gloried in the stories the old men told of the days when "men were men," and the Impis of the king were as the sand in the river bed. He loved to imagine that those days had come again, picturing himself as a mighty warrior rising, by his prowess in battle, to be captain of an Impi—aye even to the supreme council of the king. On one occasion in the midst of his dreaming he was interrupted — as often happened — by the angry petulant tones of Selele, whose hospitality he had enjoyed that day.

"Tcht! Thou lazy one. Thinkest thou the spirits will cleanse the pot while ye dream?"

"Woman, I can no longer stomach this labor. I am a man, and this is the work of maidens."

"Thou a man? Art married? Where are thy children? Where is thy head ring? Nay, thou art no man. Thou livest only because we women are tender of heart, desiring not to see a weakling such as thou starve."

"Better would it have been had my mother strangled me at birth, as was the custom, than I should be thus constantly put to scorn," he said bitterly. Then, as one seeing a way out, he added brightly, "I will no longer dwell in this place. I will go where none have ever heard of Situta—the fool."

"And where will the mighty one go and find the people know him not? Thy fame is great, O little one," scoffed the woman.

"To the white Inkosi who dwells in the big kraal at Plumtree. To him will I go and seek service among his warriors."

"Thou a policeman? Thou seek service with the white man? Art altogether mad? Well art thou named the fool."

"Ye laugh, woman, but what I have said is spoken, and the words may not be recalled." For a moment the woman was overawed, and watched him in silence as he strode away indignantly. But his gait was so much like the strutting of a cockerel that she forgot her momentary awe and burst into peals of laughter.

"O-ho!" she cried after him. "I must look to my babes lest they, too, are seized with a sudden desire to become warriors of the white men."

At Plumtree Situta sought out the captain in charge of the police. Luckily no one saw him, or he would never have been allowed to enter the hut of the captain all unbidden, as he did. The captain was engrossed in his work, and it was with no little fear that Situta stood waiting to be recognized by the white man. Yet had he ever heard that he always dealt justly with the people.

The captain looked up suddenly from his papers.

"Well, O man of littleness, what seek ye?"

"To enter thy service, Nkosi. To become a policeman."

"Ye must think the great white king is hard pressed to have need of thee."

"Nay, Nkosi, it is not that. For many years have I been a thing of reproach to all men, and I seek the service that I may become a man."

The captain laughed good naturedly, and blew three sharp blasts on a whistle,

"Nay, fear not," he said, in answer to Situta's look of terror, "I would but show thee what manner of men are found worthy to carry the spear of the great overlord."

Even as he spoke four police boys filed into the hut, saluted and stood smartly at attention.

Situta's spirits sank within him as he noticed the contemptuous manner in which the police boys eyed him. Selele had been right, such service was not for him. These were men, indeed; men who would have been mighty warriors even in the days when all men carried the spear. They towered above him as the bull towers over the new-born calf. He had never been more deeply conscious of his inferiority, and he breathed a sigh of relief when the captain dismissed them.

"Well, O would-be warrior?"

"I am answered, Nkosi, I was altogether a fool." He saluted clumsily and turned warily away.

"Wait. As I have said, O Situta, ye may not be one of the police boys, but—Canst obey orders?"

"Yea, Nkosi. That I have done all my life."

"Then thou shalt become one of the watchers of the fence, which is even now being built. Thy pay will be fifteen shillings a month; food will be given thee, also a hut, blankets, and all the things necessary."

"And will I be clad even as these others, and carry the stick of thunder?"

"A uniform of sorts, ye shall have," smiled the captain. "And a gun. Now make thy mark here, that all may be according to custom."

It was with no little wonder that the people of the Chief Radicladzi had gathered at the council place. For many days they had watched with interest the erecting of a stout, barbed-wire fence along the banks of the river. For seven days' trek in either direction, they were told, stretched this barrier between them and the river.

Near the place where they were wont to water their cattle, a gate had been let into the fence and a hut erected near by. None had dared ask the white man, the lord of

the fence, concerning it, for he was not a man to be questioned lightly, and would without doubt tell all in good time. The fence builders, men of their own race, were unable to solve the mystery.

"Know, O ye ignorant ones, the fence is built at the command of the white chief. Let that suffice thee," said some. And others:

"It is a magic to keep the disease from thy cattle." And that of course was folly, for how, look ye, could a few strands of the pricking wire keep the evil spirits away? Truly, all white men are mad!

But to-night all was to be made known and a wave of excitement swept through the assembly.

"O Radicladzi, and ye people of Radicladzi—"

"Hush! The white Inkosi is speaking."

"Ye have long questioned among yourselves concerning the fence which now runs between thy village and the river. Heed this well. Across the river, in the land of the Mapani bush, have but lately come many herds of buffalo. This ye well know. Now the white men, by their magic, know that these wild ones carry the disease that eats up thy cattle. They are things accursed, at all times possessed by spirits of evil.

"The 'pougan that is all belly,' the ticks that suck their blood, dwell in their hide, only falling to the ground when they have had their fill. Should these get on any one of thy oxen, that one would die and mayhap cause the death of all others. It is an order, therefore, that thy cattle shall not cross over to the other side at any time, and to prevent their straying thither the fence is built."

"But Nkosi, how shall we water our cattle?" interposed the chief.

"Have patience, the matter is not yet all told. One comes to dwell in the hut that was built for him—when the sun is yet high in the heavens he will come—who will open the gate for thee in the morning and again at night. Only then may ye water thy cattle. And should ye at such times permit them to stray to the other side, the guardian of the gate will bring me word, and punishment will follow. That

is all. Say now, having heard, do ye understand?"

"Yea, Nkosi. We understand and will obey."

"That is well. I leave thee now, but will come again in due season to receive the report of the guardian of the gate. He is my ears, my eyes, and my tongue. Look ye to it."

The arrival of Situta at the hut by the gate was witnessed by many of the people of Radicladzi who were idling near by. No move of his escaped their close scrutiny, yet to all outward seeming they were gossiping among themselves and were fully engrossed in the conversation.

As for Situta, he affected not to see them and occupied himself in putting away the stores that had been left him by the supply wagon. Yet withal there was a lurking fear in his heart that these people would treat him as the people of his own village; would come crowding round him, holding him up to derision. Not even the long military great coat, discarded by one of the white troopers, which, girded in at the waist by a rope, trailed in the ground behind him, could altogether smother that fear.

A whole month's pay, his first, he gave for that coat. On his head was a battered red fez, but it was clean, and the letters B. S. N. A. P. shone like gold, as did the brass buckles of his cartridge belt. In his hand he carried a rifle of an obsolete type, the bore of which was worn smooth. But he never allowed the gun to leave his hand, no matter how heavy the package he was carrying; more often than not he carried it over his shoulder at the slope. It was the symbol of his authority, his talisman—the symbol of the new life he was now entering upon.

At last his stores were all piled neatly away inside his hut, the fire lighted, and his food cooking for the evening meal. Nothing remained to be done. He squatted on his haunches and watched the villagers furtively. They were talking loudly now—about him, without doubt. Soon they would come to him, call him fool and worse, spit upon him, and deal with him in no gentle fashion. He felt that he could

bear the suspense no longer, and was tempted to cry out:

"Yes, I am here, Situta the fool. Come and work thy will on me."

And still they made no move. He half rose to his feet, determined to bring matters to an issue by going up to them. Then he remembered his new position, the authority of it, and the dignity it gave him. Mastering himself with an effort, he called aloud:

"Hi wena, come here."

One of the men came slowly toward him.

"What would ye of me, O man of the gate?"

"I desire amasse—sour milk, to eat with my mealie meal. Bid one of thy women to bring me some."

"It shall be done. Say now, how shall we call thee? What is thy name?"

Situta pondered a moment.

"Ye may call me Tousansic (his regimental number was 1006), or, again, the guardian of the gate. That is all. Now tell thy woman to hasten, for I am a hungered and would eat."

Left alone once again, Situta pondered on the victory he had won over himself.

"Without doubt, the past is past. Under the shadow of the white man's protection will I become a new man. Situta the fool is no more. But who then am I?"

Later, when the people came down to water their cattle, Situta remained in his hut until their patience was exhausted, and they cried aloud for him.

"Open thou the gate, O Tousansic."

"Art sleeping, or do ye desire us to see our cattle go mad with the thirst?"

"If ye hasten not, the oxen will break down the fence. Shall we then suffer the punishment because thou art sleeping?"

Not until then did Situta come from the hut. He yawned and stretched himself, and made a pretense of rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"Did I hear voices raised in anger?"

He drew himself erect and made play with his rifle, calling out the orders, picked up from the drill sergeant at Plumtree, in a high falsetto voice.

"'Shun!"

"Stan' at ease!"

" 'Shun! Wha' you do, you big damn fool? When I give ord' you move like 'ell. Now! Should' arm. Quick mar. Lef', ri', lef', ri'."

To the gate he marched, and with a great show of ceremony unlocked it and let the cattle through. All the time they were being watered, Situta marched sentry-go on the bank above.

One, Inyorka, seeking to try out the guardian of the gate, made a pretense to take his cattle to the other side.

He was halted by a shrill cry from the watcher on the bank.

" Hi, man of wickedness! Bring back thy cattle to this side, or the gun will speak to thee a message ye will well understand."

Inyorka shamefacedly returned with his cattle; without doubt this one, Tousansic, was not to be trifled with. How was Inyorka to know that the gun was not loaded, or that Situta had never fired a shot and most certainly could not have hit a mark at that distance? In some part it was the note of authority in Situta's voice that he also obeyed.

" I did but jest, O Tousansic."

" Such jests this gun of mine doth not understand. See that ye err not again in this way."

Situta's triumph was complete, and that night he was the one topic of conversation in the kraal of Radiclad. His dealing with Inyorka was specially dwelt upon.

" Au-a! Of a truth, the ways of the spirits of the great-great are strange. How is it possible, think ye, that such a man of wisdom and stoutness of heart can be contained in so little body?"

" The beer may be strong, yet a small calabash will hold it."

" He is in truth a great one in the councils of the white Nkosi. Remember how the Lord of the Fence said, ' He is my ears, my eyes, and my tongue! '

" A dealer in magic is he also. Noted ye the play he made with the gun that speaks with a loud noise? And the charms he made?"

" And when he spoke in anger, methought it was the cry of the eagle."

" Aie! He is indeed a man," said In-

yorka. " Look ye, I could take him in these two hands of mine and have broken him over my knee. Yet ye saw how I obeyed his voice and went not across the river with the cattle."

" Yea, truly, we saw that."

So the days sped by happily for Situta, for at last he was accepted as a man among men. His slightest commands were obeyed, and the people consulted him in all matters concerning their cattle. A greater compliment they could not have paid him, even if they had so desired.

Always, in the evening after the meal hour, he would go up to the village to share a pot of beer with the chief, and afterward watch the dancing or the wrestling bouts. Sometimes, in the manner of a novice approaching a master, the young men would invite him to try a fall with them.

" It is not meet," he would answer them, " for me, who am the white man's mouth-piece, to ply the part of a child. Ye should thank the spirits for that fact." Thus did he preserve his reputation of a mighty fighter.

And so Situta, glorying in his new-found power of authority, basking in the sun of many compliments, gained fresh confidence every day; his carriage became more erect, his voice took on a deeper note. Yet fearing, perhaps, that his present position was not sufficient to insure a continuance of the respect paid him, he was wont to tell the people fictitious stories of his prowess in fights and in the chase, always winding up with:

" And thus it was that the white man had good cause to say: ' Thou, O Tousansic, art cunning above all others. Thou art the rod upon which I lean.' "

The long-drawn-out " Au-a!" of amazement at the conclusion of his stories was sufficient payment.

Vet despite it all a fear always lurked within him—a fear that some one who knew him in other days would come to Radiclad's kraal. That he knew full well would mean his downfall.

As day by day slipped away this fear became less insistent, until finally it was only a faint gnawing at his vitals, and

could be easily silenced by describing some particularly bold deed of his to the people.

Besides his duties at the gate, Situta had also to patrol the fence, to keep it in repair, and to report any signs of the dreaded buffalo. On alternate days he went north and south, a half day's trek each way, meeting a man from the neighboring cattle-guard hut. Leaving just after the morning watering, he always returned in time to open the gate again at night. While on such trips his actions would have caused no little wonder to an observer.

Now he would run at his topmost speed, then halting suddenly would crawl on his belly for a considerable distance, taking advantage of every bit of cover. Anon he would take careful aim with his rifle and squeeze the trigger, leap to his feet, and run crying exultantly:

"Ye little thought what manner of man ye went against. Now, evil one, thy spirit hath passed on to the land of desolation, and there is none to mourn thee."

One day, on returning from his patrol, elated at the news that the captain would inspect his post on the morrow, it seemed to him that the people who were awaiting his coming at the gate looked at him contemptuously. Some even snickered as he went through the drill with his gun.

When he had closed the gate for the night, and all had departed, he pondered over the impressions he had got.

"Yet it could not have been that they were scornful of me, or that I was the cause of their mirth. Without doubt Segamba, the merry-maker, was among them. Yes, that was all."

Up at the village that night no welcoming shouts greeted his appearance, and he was conscious of many curious glances leveled at him as he took his accustomed seat near the chief. He looked expectantly at the pot of beer the chief held in his hands, but Radicladli did not offer it to him, nor in any way show that he was aware of Situta's presence. He coughed, ill at ease, then decided to plunge straightway into such a story as would dispel this feeling of uncertainty.

"Have I ever told ye, O men of Radicladli, in what manner I slew Silwane the

lion, having only a hunting knife in my hand?"

"Cease thy babbling, boaster," said Radicladli.

"What mean ye?" Situta spoke bravely, but an icy fear clutched at his heart.

"Junva, a man of thy village, passed through my kraal to-day. Dost desire to know more?"

So the blow had fallen. Junva had always been foremost among the scoffers in those other days. How far off those days were, and yet how near! Junva had told these people—what had he not told them?

Situta's first impulse was to flee the place, but was he not in the service of the white lord who had said, "Can ye obey an order?" and he had replied "Yea." At this place he had been ordered to "Stay until relieved." There was no way out.

"Well, O chief, what said Junva that concerns Tousansic?"

"Nay. Why bandy names? We know thee now for what ye are—Situta. Situta the fool. We know that ye have lied to us in all things; art a man of little worth, fit only to consort with the maidens, never having been admitted to the manhood of thy village.

"All that ye have told us are lies. No warrior thou, never have ye followed the hunting trail, but have been ever content with the food scorned by dogs—dog that ye are. To us ye came, thy belly full of lies, and crawled into our huts like a snake. Ah! Thou a rod upon which the white man leans? Look ye to it that the rod doth not lean on thee!"

"Now get ye gone from my village, unless perchance the maidens will make a place for thee around their fire."

"Thy words are harsh, O chief. In some part they are true, yet go ye only on the word of one who was ever my enemy. And wilt thou pass judgment on me now for what I was? Thou wert once a child, but now is there one to say that Radicladli the chief is a child?"

"This is no matter for words. Thou wert Situta the fool. That ye cannot change. For the rest, would ye have me go to thy friends for thy character? Where then are they?"

"Bear with me a while longer. To-morrow the white Nkosi comes to this place. Do ye and all thy people come down to the hut and mark how the white man deals with me. Then, then shall ye pass judgment."

"It will be to thy greater shame, but so much will I grant thee. Until then thou art still Tousansic. Now tell us how ye slew the lion." The chief spoke sarcastically.

"Nay, I must return to my hut to make ready for the coming of the white man."

Situta walked briskly away until well out of sight of the people at the council place. Then his head sunk between his shoulders, and his whole form drooped. He was well aware that it would be impossible for him to stay at this place unless he were content to stay always at his own hut—never going up to the village.

Even so, could he face boldly the taunts and mocking jeers that would be leveled at him? He would be once more a thing scorned, a stone whereon the young men would sharpen their wits. No, that he could not bear.

Why had he challenged the people to witness his treatment at the hands of the white man? True, he had dealt kindly with him at Plumtree, but Situta knew that he could not possibly hope for any demonstration that would give color to his foolish boast that he was the rod on which the white man leaned.

The landscape was alight with the soft radiance of the moon, and his shadow went ever before him, distorted and of gigantic proportions. Anon the moon passed behind a cloud and his shadow was no more.

"Ai-e!" he murmured bitterly. "It is even so with me. I became big, by the shadow of my lies. The truth comes, and lo! I am shorn of my power."

A puff adder slowly crossed his path. He nearly trod on it, but the reptile made no attempt to strike him.

"It is true, I am scorned by all things. Even death will have none of me."

The sun was high in the heavens when a cloud of dust in the distance heralded the coming of the white Nkosi. Situta, safe in the protection of his hut, was first

made aware of his approach by the murmurs of the vast concourse of people who had gathered about the gate to witness his discomfiture.

"Ah, the Nkosi is coming."

"Now shall we see this boaster abased."

"It will be great sport, though in truth there is no need for this further proof. Seeing the man, how is it possible that he could have done all whereof he boasted?"

"And his voice, brother, is it not like the cackling of a hen?"

Situta still remained in his hut—for he dared not face the eyes of the people—listening intently to their words—listening though he would fain have closed his ears.

"A fool he is and as weak as a maiden."

"Yea, and a coward. Remember ye that time he bade me turn back from crossing the river, how his voice quavered with fear? And that despite that he carried the stick that kills from afar."

"That was the voice of Nyorka," mused Situta. "Yet he obeyed my voice."

"*Sauka bona, Radicladli. Sauka bona abantu comina.*"

"Ai-e! Good day to thee also, Nkosi."

Situta shrank back into a corner of his hut. The white man was here, and the time of reckoning was at hand.

"Where, O ye people, is Situta, the guardian of the gate?"

"In the hut, Nkosi. Did you mark that brother? He called him Situta."

All hope of further concealment having vanished, Situta resolved to put a brave face on the matter, came out of the hut quickly and came smartly to the salute.

"I await thy orders, Nkosi."

"What make ye here? Why are ye not on patrol?"

"I stayed, Nkosi, to welcome thee at this place."

"Thy orders were to patrol the fence every day; is this how ye obey, fool? While ye were idling here the fence was broken yonder. Now come with me, O thou man of little worth." To Radicladli he said: "I will return, O chief, when the fence is mended, and will hold court in the council place."

Wheeling his horse he set off at a hand gallop back along the fence.

Situta, heavily laden with coils of barbed wire, nails, and hammer, his rifle slung across his shoulder, made a great attempt to keep up with him, but was soon forced to slow down to a walk, the jeers of the people ringing in his ears. When he came to the break in the fence he found the white man had dismounted and was scanning the ground eagerly.

"Come hither, Situta, and tell me what ye see."

"A herd of Impala were feeding here, Nkosi. Yonder stood the bull, the lord of the herd. Of a sudden he was affrighted—see ye how he pawed the ground, thus giving the alarm. Then they all fled, the first dashing into the fence, where they fell as ye can plainly see. The spoor is plain."

"Thou art not altogether a fool. Now what frightened them? The ground is hard and I cannot read the spoor."

In ever-widening circles Situta cast about for the further evidence which would make the cause of the fright clear. After a while he gave an exclamation of discovery.

"I have found it, Nkosi. Here by the bush, Silwane, the lion, crouched, making ready to spring."

"How long since, think ye?"

"In my judgment, but a little while after sunrise."

"Um! And it is not yet twelve o'clock. What think ye? Where is the lion?"

"See ye, Nkosi, the strong one made a kill. Here is the blood, and note how he dragged the buck. Without doubt he is near by, resting close to his kill during the heat of the day."

Excitement had conquered any fear Situta might have had when he first noted the lion's spoor. Besides, was not the white man with him?

"Come, then, we will follow the spoor. Lead on."

The veldt hereabouts was barren of trees, but here and there were large clumps of reeds and tall grasses, which all made potential hiding places of the lion, so they walked warily.

"Nkosi," Situta whispered excitedly, pointing to a clump just in front of them, "Silwane is there."

"Good. Load thy rifle—ye know how—and should I fail, ye will kill him."

How often Situta had imagined just such a situation, and now face to face with it, his fingers shook so that he could scarce take the cartridges from his belt.

The captain threw a large pebble into the grasses, another, and another. Then, as though in answer to such rude summons, like an arrow from the bow, a splendid body leaped from the cover, a tawny thing of concentrated death.

Dropping to one knee the captain fired, but the shot was too high, just missing the brain, and before he could fire again the lion was upon him, sending him headlong.

No bullet could arrest such a charge in mid air. Hunter and hunted lay in a huddled heap. The lion rose and stood over the man, for a moment still stunned by the bullet, but as the temporary paralysis wore off, and the pain—that hot flame that seared him—began to assert itself, he lashed his tail in anger and turned the captain over and over with his paw.

Meanwhile the white man, well versed in the ways of the big cats, kept perfectly still, shielding his face with his arms. He knew that Situta was his only chance. So far the lion was regarding him as a curiosity; had not even unsheathed his paws, uncertain what to do with him.

As for Situta, his heart had turned to water within him. He desired to run. Yet fear—and something else—kept him from doing so. The great white Nkosi had failed, how then could he hope to succeed?

This was the end. At least he would die with the white man. "To accompany such a one to the land of the great-great is a thing greatly to be desired," he murmured. But what was it the white man had said?

"If I fail, then ye will shoot. My life will be in thy hands."

That was an order.

He walked cautiously up to the lion. Once the beast looked up from the "cat-and-mouse" game he was playing and snarled fiercely at Situta, who stopped dead in his tracks, only to move on again, inch by inch, when the lion turned his attention to the white man once more.

Now he was quite close. He held his rifle almost up to the lion's ear, shut his eyes, and pressed the trigger.

The big cat walked slowly away from the white man, and lay down in the shade of the reeds close by. A nervous twitch or two, and all was over.

Joyfully Situta helped the white man to his feet—unhurt save for a few bruises.

"Thou hast played the man this day, O Situta. Nay, thou shalt be called Situta no longer, but Silwane, for thou hast a lion heart. Speak now, what shall be given to such a one as a reward?"

"The name thou hast given me is all sufficient, Nkosi."

"Why, what mean ye?"

Silwane told his story, falteringly at first, then as he saw how sympathetic the white man was, with ever-growing confidence.

"And so, Nkosi, they found out that I was but a fool, a liar, and a boaster. In no way was I the rod upon which ye leaned."

At the council place the people were awaiting the coming of the white Nkosi to hold court. When he came they were astounded to see Situta walking at his right hand.

"He is going to hold him to trial," the whisper went round.

But no. The white man took the seat

of judgment that had been prepared for him, and just behind and a little to the right stood the guardian of the gate.

"Radicladji," began the white man, "the fence is yet unmended. I have considered the matter, and it is not meet for a lion-killer to do such work. Send, therefore, some of thy young men to repair the fence.

"Ye look astounded. Know ye that Inkosikaas, the queen of the heavens, regards this one with favor. He is at all parts a man. And ye, ye and thy people, have seen fit to make a mock of him.

"Near to the break in the fence thy young men will find the body of a lion that this one killed, thus saving me from his jaws. They shall take the skin and give it to this one. His name is Silwane, the Lion.

"I tell ye that he is the rod whereon I lean. Mark well, then, how ye deal with him, and be slow at all times to judge too hastily. The way of the great-great is not always plain."

That night a great feast was held in the village of Radicladji. In the seat of honor sat Silwane, his feet resting on a magnificent lion skin.

The young men danced the story of the kill. The name of the hunter was cried aloud:

"Silwane!"



THE DRAFT

BY CLINTON SCOLLARD

OVER the rim of the world
The sun lifts up;
And lo! there's the joy of life
For man to sup—
A golden draft to drain from a golden cup!

Under the rim of the world
The sun dips down;
And where is the joy of life
That was once its crown?
Never again that draft for the king or clown!

Comrades of Peril

by Randall Parrish

Author of "The Strange Case of Cavendish," "The Devil's Own," "When Wilderness Was King," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

HE stood clutching him tightly, both staring in startled fear out through the open door into the dim light of the front room. There could be no doubt of who was approaching the cabin, and there was no possible way of escape. The whole situation flashed through Shelby's mind—if Macklin was alone he could handle him; yet there was danger that the man might shoot, and the report be overheard by others. Then, again, he might not be alone. It was better to make sure first, and then act. But how?

A possibility occurred to him—it was dark within that second room; he could slip back into the corner, and remain concealed; perhaps the fellow would talk, would reveal his plans; at least, once at his ease, he could be made the victim of surprise. But would Olga play the part necessary?

"Can you act?" he whispered hastily; "we must fool that fellow."

"Act! I will try. How do you mean? What am I to do?"

"Make him talk. Let him think you are all right; above all, keep him from suspecting that I am either here, or even alive."

"But how can I"—breathlessly—"with the door unbarred, and those dead men? He will know something has gone wrong."

"Tell him they fought and killed each other, but that first they unbarred the door. You found them there, and dragged the bodies under the bench. You dared not go away; you were afraid. Make up some story. There he is now!"

He left her, frightened and dismayed by this sudden emergency, and sprang back into the darkest corner, crouching against the log wall. Slagin's revolver in his hand, Shelby was willing enough to fight it out, eager indeed to come to grips with the fellow, but perhaps there might be a better way—one which make clear their future. If she would only induce him to reveal his plans, gain his confidence.

He could see her there in the dim light bending forward and listening, a slender, girlish figure. Then the outer door crashed open, letting in a flood of light from without, and a step sounded heavily on the floor. The young woman straightened up, the clear profile of her face revealed. Somehow Shelby knew she had braced herself for the contest. Macklin must have stopped just within the door, staring about him in uncertainty.

"What the hell is up here?" he burst forth angrily, confused by the gloom. "Sam, where are you?"

"Who is Sam?" she asked quietly, and taking a step forward. "Is that the name of the Indian you left on guard?"

He gazed at her open-mouthed, for the

moment too astonished to even find speech. Her presence, but more still her calmness, seemed to fairly paralyze his faculties.

"What," he stammered finally, "why, what are you doing out here? Who opened that door? Where is the damned red snake, anyway?"

"I do not know very much more than you do," she replied quietly. "There was a fight out here some time during the night, and the bar across the door was knocked down."

"A fight! Who were they?"

"A white man and the guard. They were both killed. The bodies are there beneath that bench."

"Both—both killed!" He seemed unable to grasp the fact. "Who was the white man?"

"I do not know."

"And you did not even run away—didn't try to escape?"

"Where could I go?" she asked. "What was there for me to do but wait for you to return?"

"Well, if this don't beat hell!" he exclaimed. "Why, I thought you was afraid of me. You ain't, hey?"

"No; I—I don't think I am. You were not rough with me, and—and you said you would have something interesting to tell me when you got back."

Macklin laughed, evidently relieved. She had spoken as a child might whose curiosity had been aroused. No doubt she appeared to the fellow suddenly in a new light.

"Oh, I see, my girl; you've been thinking this over, have you, and decided I might not be quite so bad after all. I thought maybe you'd get over that tantrum after a while, fer shucks. I knew that feller Shelby was nothin' to you. You just married him ter git away from Ponca, didn't yer?"

"Yes," she admitted, "that was about all."

"So, now he's dead, he don't cut no ice any more."

"But are you sure he's dead?"

"Sure"—sneeringly—"I don't know how I could be no surer. I turned the cuss over, an' he was cold then. You don't need worry none about that. Wait a minute till I see

who the guy was what tried to break in here."

She had advanced into the outer room, and Shelby edged cautiously along the wall to get as closely behind as possible without exposing himself. He could hear Macklin cross the room and jerk the blanket from off the bodies. The fellow gave utterance to an oath of astonishment at the sight revealed.

"My God! did you ever see anything like that? Locked together like two stags. Hell! Sam was shot, but he got the white guy even after he was dead. Damn me, if it ain't Hank Slagin! Now, what the hell does that mean? I reckon Hanley sent the galoot in here. That comes from spillin' things when yer drunk. Say, that guy didn't say nothin' to you, did he?"

"I never saw him."

"But the bar was taken down."

"It must have been knocked down during the fight. I didn't know the door was open until later."

"Then that's all right; only you an' I have got to get out of here. I'll tell you about it as quick as I can. I didn't go to Gerlasche; that's why I'm back here so soon, an' it's damn lucky I come. It's plain enough Hanley's got his eyes on you, an' will double-cross me if he once gits a chance."

"What is it you mean? I do not understand."

"Naturally yer don't, seein' I ain't told yer nothin'. But now that I know yer ain't pining away over that feller Shelby, I reckon the sensible thing fer me to do is ter talk straight. There's goin' ter be hell to pay in this valley before long, and the sooner we get out of here the better. I run across a soldier 'bout half-way ter Gerlasche, an' he give me a pointer that made me wheel about, an' ride back. He was carryin' despatches."

"The Indian outbreak?"

"Sure; the troops got in an' rounded most of the Sioux up. They had a fight at Wounded Knee, over yonder, an' licked hell out of the reds. Some of 'em got away, though, an' come trailin' west—mostly young ones, I reckon, an' now they're sendin' cavalry out ter ride 'em down."

That's what he was after, a bunch to come scoutin' in through here."

"Here? Wolves' Hole?"

"More 'n likely; he didn't say nothin' 'bout that. But they're mighty liable ter call. Some of those soldier guys must know this place, an' the valley is full of reds right now a hidin' out. There is goin' to be one hell of a fight if a bunch of them soldiers ever drop in here; believe me, I'm fer gettin' out while the goin's good. That's what I come back for—to get you and skip."

"To—get me?"

"Of course. I'll tell yer about it now, an' you'll go, all right. I thought maybe you wouldn't the way you acted before, but now you seem to have got some sense. That's what I like in a girl. I reckon you never thought I run off with you 'cause I loved you?"

"No—you—you loved me?"

"That's the way of it. I saw you long before that funeral down to Ponca; but this guy Shelby horned in 'fore I was ready to act. Then I got a chance to go out 'long with him to herd steers," he laughed scornfully. "But just the same I knew how things was; I could see that plain enough ridin' along behind. You didn't care nothin' for him; not a tinker's dam. So I says to myself: then I'll have her; I'll take her whether she wants me or not. Long as she don't love him, I'll make her love me, see? Course I didn't aim to do no killin'; that was just an accident like, an' I didn't do it nohow. It was Sam here who got gay and beanned Shelby. All I told him to do was to knock the fellow out, so we'd get a good start on the trail."

"But what would you do with me if—if he had been alive?"

"There ain't no use discussin' that, fer he ain't alive. It's what I want ter do now that counts. Maybe I had a plan then, an' maybe I didn't. But now I got it all planned up proper. I'm a goin' ter marry you. An' that goes, whether yer are willin' or not; I ain't even askin' you."

The expression of her face must have brought the fellow a realization that perhaps he was going altogether too fast, for he broke in with an explanation.

"See here, now, don't get huffy. I ain't

no Western roughneck for you to be ashamed of. I belong down East in ol' Virginia, an' we got money to burn. That's straight goods. My real name ain't Macklin at all; it's Churchill. You'll have things mighty soft after you marry me; a darn sight different from that Cottonwood ranch. Anyhow, young lady, I mean business, an' just as soon as Indian Joe gets down here with some horses, we're a goin' ter start."

"For where?" her voice trembling in spite of every effort at self-control.

"To Gerlasche first; there's a preacher there, an' then on to God's country just as fast as the train will take us. That's my program, an' let me tell you, I'll be damn glad ter git away from Injuns, Mexes, an' the rest o' this rotten outfit. No, you wait; that will be Indian Joe comin' now."

The door between the two rooms had closed partially, yielding doubtless to some faint draft of air, so that Shelby ventured to survey the scene through the narrow crack near the hinges. Matters were becoming so complicated he was at his wit's end. This sudden resolve of Macklin to immediately flee the valley and take Olga along with him, overturned his every hope of their escape. He had delayed too long, and perhaps it had been a mistake to advise the girl to thus appear friendly to this brute. The egotism of the fellow had at once taken everything for granted. Now, instead of being confronted by the Kid alone, he must also face Laud, if he would prevent her being carried away the second time. The situation had become desperate.

He could see the girl standing pressed close to the wall, the light from the broken window on her face, her eyes anxiously watchful of the movements of Macklin, who had turned and was fronting the outer door, one hand resting in readiness on the butt of his .45. Then that opening was shadowed, and the bulky figure of the squaw man suddenly appeared. He stopped on the threshold blinking into the gloom, barely able to distinguish for a moment the outlines of the two. His first utterance was full of ill-humor.

"Well, I got your message, and am here," he said roughly. "What the hell is up, Macklin?"

"Everything is, from all I hear," was the short reply. "Your Indians are licked already, ain't they?"

"Yes; I expected that; I told them how it would be."

"To be sure you did, but you never thought every runaway buck would make for this Hole. But they have; and you know what that means, I reckon. They will be smoked out sooner or later. Do you want to stay, and be smoked out with 'em?"

Laud gave utterance to an oath, but otherwise did not speak. Macklin gave him little opportunity.

"Now I'm for getting out of here now—tonight, Joe. I don't intend being caught in this net; an' you are a damned fool if you don't feel in the same way. There is a chance now to make it, but to-morrow may be too late. How about your cattle?"

"I sent them into the bad lands."

Macklin laughed.

"That proves what you think about it. All right, then; we'll ride out together. Got three horses out there?"

"Yes, and a pack; that's what the Indian told me to bring. The woman going along?"

"Sure she is. Hell, we've fixed things all up. We're goin' to get married over at Gerlasche. I'm aimin' ter take you along for best man."

Laud evidenced his surprise and incredulity with a grunt, and a swift glance at the silent girl, shrinking back against the wall.

"What about Pancha?" he asked dryly.

"That little devil! Pooh! When she learns about it I'll be east of the Missouri. She's all right for a Mex, but this time I mean business, Joe. Don't you forget it; I'm playin' for big stakes, an' there don't no Pancha stand in my way. What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Well, I ain't so sure you're goin' ter git off so scott free," returned Laud slowly. "There's something happened here while you was away I don't just like the looks of. There's a fellow been in here huntin' you; an' I reckon he must be here yet—leastways, I don't know how the cuss could have got out."

"A man—hunting me? You're dreamin'."

"No, I ain't. The fellow joined my outfit up on the mesa yesterday—sorter big fellow with light hair an' a smooth face. He put up quite a spiel, an' claimed his name was Churchill. I didn't more'n half believe him, but not knowin' what was up, I let the cuss drift in along with us. I thought if he was all right it wouldn't do no harm; while if he was a liar, we'd soon find it out, an' could attend to the case. I aimed to see you as soon as we got in; but, hell, you had skipped, while Hanley, who might have known something, was up at the cove. I sent Juan after him, for by that time I was sure the guy was some damn spy. The hoss he was ridin' had the same brand of them cattle I drove in."

"The same brand? What brand?"

"The three stars; they come from Shelby's ranch up on the Cottonwood."

"Hell! A big fellow you said, with light hair and smooth face?"

"That's him; grayish-blue eyes, an' rides like a cavalryman. I never saw the galoot before, but I wa'n't goin' to take no chances, so I got his gun and locked him up."

"Where?"

"In that cell room in Villemont's cabin."

"And he's there yet?"

"No, he ain't; that's the trouble. Somehow he got hold of a knife; must have it hid on him, I reckon. Anyhow, he cut them bars at the window, an' wiggled through. Damned if I see how he ever did it, a big guy like him; but when morning come he was sure gone."

"An' he hasn't been caught?"

"Ain't seen hide ner hair o' him. I took the trail soon as it was daylight, but he must have stuck to the rocks an' water. I got a few tracks at first, but that was all. Some guy helped him outside; there was prints of two kinds of boots plain enough under the window, but after that they might just as well have gone up in the air."

"Two of 'em? The other couldn't have been Hanley, or Slagin, could it?"

"How the hell do I know? I never caught sight o' nothin' but the print of that boot. I scouted up the creek; then that first bunch o' Indians come trailin' in, an' I ain't had no time to think about anything since, only gettin' my cattle out o' here."

"But you'll go with us now?"

"For a ways, anyhow; I reckon there ain't nothin' else to do; them soldiers is bound to get there."

"And the sooner we're off the better. I'd like to know who that guy is, but there ain't no time now to stay and hunt him. You ready?"

He wheeled and confronted the shrinking, frightened girl, who made no reply.

"Well, by God! you better be. Get the horses, Joe; I'll fetch her along, all right."

Shelby straightened up. In spite of the odds, he must act now, or never. Yet, before he could taken a step forward, a single shot rang out sharply. He saw Macklin fling up his arms and reel backward, his body striking the half-open door before it crashed to the floor and lay motionless.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIRST SHOTS.

THE impact of Macklin's body had flung the door wide open, leaving Shelby fully exposed to view. For an instant, however, the startled and bewildered Laud failed to note his revealment against the darkness of that interior. He had leaped back instantly to the protection of the wall, and, gun in hand, crouched there with eyes fixed on the broken window opposite. Shelby was swift to take advantage of his surprise. Wherever the shot had come from, whoever had fired it, his concealment was no longer possible. There must be no hesitancy, no delay. He stepped across the motionless body with weapon flung grimly forward.

"Hands up, Joe! Put them up first before you turn around. Stop that! Don't try any tricks on me. Now stand there. Olga!"

"Yes."

"Take that gun out of his hand; there is another in his belt, better get that also. That's right; now come over here; you understand firearms?"

"Yes, of course"—wonderingly. "I know how to shoot."

"I imagined so; Calkins would have

taught you. Keep this fellow covered, and let him have it if he makes any effort to break away. Watch him closely while I rip up that blanket and tie him up."

He left her with the gun steadily pointed at Laud's head, the fellow cursing, with hands up, his angry eyes following every movement. He was desperate, maddened by sudden helplessness, with the sneaking ferocity of a wolf, yet was temporarily held motionless by the deadly peril. Shelby stripped the ragged blanket from off the dead bodies under the bench, and began hastily to rip it apart. The black, bloated face of Slagin stared upward, and Indian Joe saw it for the first time, a sudden spasm of terror causing him to burst forth.

"My God! What's that?"

"A little reminder, Joe," returned Shelby sternly. "Life is mighty cheap around here."

"But that's Hank Slagin."

"Sure it is; he got his, an' you'll get yours if you drop those hands, you cur. Turn around now and stop talk."

Laud obeyed, his face ugly and threatening, and Shelby took a step closer, the strip of blanket in his hands, his revolver thrust back into his belt. What Indian Joe saw will never be known; perhaps a slight wavering in the eyes of the girl, perhaps an instant lowering of her gun. But it was enough; all his hate and treachery drove him to a desperate chance. With the maddened leap of a wild beast, he sprang upon Shelby, gripped him fiercely by the throat, and the two went headlong to the floor.

Olga fired, but without aim, missing them both, and dare not pull trigger again. So tightly were the men grappled, as they rolled back and forth in frenzied effort to obtain mastery, Shelby, taken completely by surprise, was at a disadvantage, his throat crushed by sinewy hands, his loosened revolver flung half across the room. He could only struggle to break the hold of his antagonist, rolling over and over, and forcing the fellow's head back with every ounce of strength he could summon into play.

They were not unevenly matched, the two—Shelby the younger, and perhaps the stronger; but Laud, a skilled fighter, hard

as nails, and ready to resort to any trick. Moreover, he knew what he had set out to accomplish, and bent every effort to prevent the frightened girl from getting a shot at him. He hung on, his straining hands, like a vise, twisting tighter and tighter Shelby's shirt-band, careless of any injury to himself, so that he kept the body of the latter in protection between him and Olga's revolver. Yet, with every move, every straining whirl of their bodies, he gained an inch nearer the open door. He fought like an animal, sinking his teeth into Shelby's flesh, and driving his knees into his body.

It was silent, bitter fighting, every muscle strained to the utmost, and the squawman won. They knocked over the bench, and crashed out through the partially open door, rolling down the single step into the weeds. Laud landed on top, his fingers still clutched on Shelby's throat, the latter half unconscious. Crazed, maddened as he was, the one desire to escape overcame his eagerness to kill, and Indian Joe, cursing, struck once at the upturned face, leaped to his feet and plunged into the shelter of the woods. Shelby, gasping painfully for breath, scarcely yet fully realizing what had occurred, lay motionless but for the quivering of his limbs.

Indeed he had scarcely forced open his eyes when Olga was beside him.

"You—you are alive? He did not kill you!"

He endeavored to smile, lifting himself upon one elbow.

"No, no; I am all right," he gasped. "The fellow got my throat, and I couldn't break his hold. The treacherous hound got me that time. You fired once?"

"Yes, but did not dare try it again. I got as near as I could," she explained swiftly, "but he managed to strike me with his foot, and knocked me down. Then you rolled out of the door; there was no time for me to do anything."

"I know; I was a fool, and off my guard; it is no fault of yours; I should have taken no chances with the dog. Where did he go?"

"Down there, through the weeds to the creek; he had a horse down below."

"And rode away?"

"I think so; I am not sure. I—I cared for nothing then but you; I thought perhaps he had killed you."

Shelby struggled to his feet, his strength returning, although he could scarcely swallow, and every word he uttered pained him.

"That devil will be back; the Hole is full of Indians. Our only chance is to get away before he can gather a bunch of his kind together."

"Get away? Where?"

"Up the bluff; the place in which I hid last night. Once safely a hundred yards up the creek we would be out of sight, and it will take them a while at least to find us. I believe the trail goes clear to the top. But wait; my revolver is inside the cabin."

He started back, and Olga followed closely. Standing upon the step, and looking down the valley, his head now above the level of the surrounding weeds, Shelby's teeth clinched tightly to keep back an oath, and his eyes darkened.

"There's no time left," he said grimly, pointing. "Laud has got his gang already; we're sure up against it now."

Even as she stood beside him, straining her neck to see, the cadence of a wild whoop came echoing to them from the distance; they were coming across the flat, riding straight for the cabin, and lashing their ponies as they came.

"Are—are they after us?" she sobbed, grasping his arm. "Are—are you sure?"

"No doubt of it; that's Laud a leadin' 'em. Them Injuns will do whatever he says. Come in quick; we got to fight it out here. I reckon there ain't much chance, but I'm likely to get some o' that outfit. Hurry, Olga; there ain't even a minute to lose."

He crashed the door shut and flung the bar into place, then dragged forward the heavy bench and braced it as best he could. The interior was dark, only the little stream of light stealing in through the hole he had wrenched in the planking of the window, enabling them to find their way about. He had to feel along the floor to recover his lost weapon, and before he could straighten up again the wild chorus of yells rang out close at hand, mingled with the sound of horses crashing recklessly through the maze

of weeds—almost to the very door. Olga had shrunk back against the side wall, and Shelby could scarcely locate her in the gloom. He was the fighting man now, cool and eager.

"You have the two guns yet?"

"Yes."

"Give me one of them. Probably I am the best shot."

He looked straight into her eyes.

"You are not frightened, little girl?"

"Oh, yes, I am; but—but I am not going to break down; you—you don't need to be afraid of me."

"I'm not; I know the real thing when I see it. You'll stay till hell freezes over. Only see here first—do you know who those devils are out there?"

"Sioux Indians, ain't they?"

"Aye, and the worst of the tribe—outcasts, hell-hounds, and the white man with 'em is no better. There ain't goin' to be no mercy in this fight. Whatever happens, don't you let 'em take you. Maybe they'll get me first, but if they do you keep a shot in your gun. You know what I mean?"

The lines about her mouth hardened; there was a semblance of the old sullen look in her eyes.

"I know, Tom Shelby," she said steadily; "Dad Calkins used to tell me that before I ever met you. I ain't goin' to be made prisoner."

He gulped in his throat, his lips grim and hard set.

"Maybe you'd shake hands?" he asked doubtfully. "Seems to me I'd rather like it if you did."

"Of course I will," and she thrust out both hands to him in sudden eagerness. "Why shouldn't I, Tom Shelby? I like you."

In the darkness she could scarcely see his face, but she felt the grip of his fingers, and caught the eager tremor in his voice.

"I sure am glad you said that," he admitted, as helpless to express himself as a child. "I sorter wanted you to for—for a long while. Hell! That's Laud out there now."

He stepped over beside the door, whipping both revolvers from his belt and holding one in each hand. A small, round hole

had been dug through the adobe plaster between the logs, and he bent down with his eye to the opening. The scene revealed beyond was a narrow one, a little segment of a circle, but he gained glimpse of those close at hand.

A tall, rangy white man with a dirty skin and scraggling red beard was nearest at hand; and beyond him crouched an Indian naked to the waist, his face blackened and chest disfigured with gaudy paint. There were others behind these scattered out in fan shape, but he could only make them out indefinitely. Laud stood so close to the door his face could not be seen, but he held a rifle in his hands, pounding with the stock on the wood as he angrily demanded admittance.

"Come on out of there, you big fool!" he roared, maddened by the silence. "We saw you go back inside, and we've got you this time. Come on, now; I won't ask you again!"

"On what terms?"

Shelby asked this more to prolong delay than anything else. The fellows knew they were there, and it was useless to pretend otherwise.

"Terms—hell!" and Indian Joe burst out into a loud laugh. "Hear the cock crow, Hanley. We'll make terms when we get hands on you, you damn sneaking spy. Only I'll say this, you'll get it harder if you hang on after we do get you—an', by God! we'll get yer sooner or later."

"We'll take the chances, Laud, and you'd better know the fun is not going to be all on one side."

"It won't, hey! So yer goin' ter fight? All right, but there's more o' this outfit comin', an' yer a blamed idiot. If we can't git yer no other way, I reckon we can burn yer out. Come out now—save time and open up."

He struck hard and angrily with his gun-stock, but the stout wood held. Shelby made no answer, again bending low and peering out through the narrow opening. The obstinate silence must have maddened the fellow, for he suddenly reversed his weapon and fired. The ball crashed through the wood, leaving a jagged hole, and embedded itself in the solid log of a

back wall. Before the smoke blew away Shelby replied, sighting out through the small aperture, determined to make every shot count.

The nearest white man flung up his arm, which dripped blood, grabbed it and ran; the crouching Indian behind crumpled up as though crushed by some sudden weight and never moved. Laud sprang backward, startled by the swift response from within, the smoke swirling up between his fingers, and Shelby let drive. Whether the speeding bullet struck or missed, he never knew, but the squaw-man gave one startled leap into the concealment of the weeds, fell headlong, and then went scrambling down to the bank of the stream. It was all so swiftly accomplished as to seem like a lightning picture.

When the smoke cloud rolled away not a figure was to be seen. Shelby stood up, grimly smiling, and replaced the cartridges in his weapon. The end was not yet, but it was evident he had taught them a lesson in caution.

For a moment, blinded by gazing out into the sunlight, he could see nothing clearly about him, not even the figure of Olga. He took a step or two back into the gloom of the room, nearly falling over the two dead bodies on the floor. The uncanny touch of them against his foot gave his nerves a sudden shock.

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Here, by the other door. What has happened?"

He laughed, put at ease by the quick response of her voice.

"Oh, I took pot-shot out through a hole in the wall. I thought we might as well start the ball, Joe was getting so gay. Touched up two of them; now they'll go back and talk it over."

"But they'll be back?"

"Sure; the Indians will be for waiting till night, an' that ain't far off. Maybe they will, but Laud is some mad, I reckon; the way he went down that bank was a caution. I ain't seen nothing funnier for a long while. What are you doing down there?"

There was a note of startled surprise in her voice.

"Why, this is strange! I—I hadn't no-

ticed before; I was too frightened perhaps—but come quick, Macklin's body is not here! It—it is gone!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ATTACK ON THE CABIN.

THREE was no sound from without, except occasionally the echo of a distant voice shouting. Shelby, startled by these words, and alarmed by her agitation, crossed the room. He could see better now, his eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom, while the single ray of light streaming through the broken shutter fell directly on the spot where the body had been previously lying on the floor. It was gone, actually gone! As he bent over, incredulous, distrusting the evidence of his own eyes, he could perceive the stain of blood in which the man had fallen, but that was all. There was no semblance of a body there. Shelby stared about into the dark shadows, almost believing he dreamed; then into the dimly revealed outlines of the girl's face.

"Judas priest!" he said soberly. "This beats anything ever I saw. He couldn't have been killed, but I never saw him twitch a muscle after he dropped. Gone! Darn if I know what to make of it. Why, where could he have gone to? There ain't but one way out from this shack, an' he sure didn't go out there."

"No, he couldn't," her voice quavering. "We would have seen him if he had."

"Seen him! Of course we would. He must have revived and crawled away. You bet there ain't no mystery about it. Dead men ain't movin' around, an' there ain't no angels comin' down to carry that cuss off. What's happened is he got back strength enough to crawl. Likely he got into that back room out o' sight. Anyhow, I'm goin' to find out what's happened. You keep an eye at that hole in the wall yonder while I scout around a minute. If you see anything movin' in shootin' distance, just blaze away."

She went forward as he told her without a word and stared out, yet nervously turning her head about at the slightest sound. Shelby waited a moment, listening, and then

stepped confidently forward across the threshold of the inner door. He had no doubt of what he would discover—Macklin, dead or alive, outstretched on the floor. The fellow must be there; he could have gone nowhere else.

The place was as black as night; a step beyond the entrance, and he had to grope his way blindly, unable to distinguish a single object. There was something grim and ghastly in feeling about with his feet for an unseen body. Then the fellow might still be alive, even dangerous. He stopped at the disquieting thought and spoke sharply into the gloom:

"Are you there, Macklin? Come, speak up; nobody is going to hurt you."

There was no response, no movement, no sound of a groan, no pulsing of breath. The stillness was intense, horrible. Shelby gripped himself and began to advance slowly, guiding his passage along the wall, expecting every instant to encounter some obstacle. His groping feet touched nothing. Inch by inch, he explored the floor of the room, the perspiration beginning to stand in drops on his forehead. There was no body lying there, no form of a man, either living or dead; the place was absolutely unoccupied.

He could hardly believe this true; his mind refused to grasp the fact; he came back to the door dazed and unnerved. Good God! the fellow couldn't have got away; there was no means of escape, no opening. All nature, all reasoning, told him the man must be somewhere within the cabin; any other thought was simply impossible; yet where? He had already explored every inch of surface to no result. So bewildered and dumfounded was he before this mystery he was even startled at the girl's voice asking an eager question.

"Is he there? Did you find him?"

"No; I confess I can't make the affair out. It certainly beats my time completely. He's gone as though he had a pair of wings."

"But how could he get out?"

"That's what I say. Everything is solid; no human could vanish through these walls; there isn't a window not boarded up, and only one door. We wasn't outside ten min-

utes, nor ten feet away from the step. A rat couldn't have passed without bein' seen. Blamed if it don't make me shiver, for, by thunder, however it happened, he ain't here; he ain't nowhere in this cabin. An'," he added, peering at the floor, "there ain't no trail o' blood to show that he crawled away; just that little pool what he laid in."

"Could he have got through the roof, or the floor?"

Shelby laughed despondently.

"Lord, I don't easily see how he could; it's fifteen feet to them rafters, an' no opening, while, judging from outside, the floor must rest plumb on the ground. Who shot him, anyhow? Did you see?"

"Yes, I did," she explained excitedly. "I was looking that way, toward where the board was ripped off the window. I just had a glimpse of a face behind the muzzle of the gun. It was a woman; I am sure it was a woman with black eyes. Then the smoke obscured everything, and she was gone."

"A young woman with black eyes?"

"Yes, a girl rather, and—and pretty."

"She must have been Pancha," he admitted, struggling with the idea. "Why, of course, that's all plain enough. She overheard what he said, and fired in mad passion."

"What do you mean? What are you talking about, this girl?"

"Sure; I told you about her; she helped me escape last night. She was crazily jealous over Macklin. He had made love to her, no doubt, and her only desire then was to get rid of you. She thought you were trying to get the fellow away from her, and the only reason she helped me was because I promised to take you away with me."

"But who is she? Does she live in this place?"

"She is Mexican, and is here with her brother—a little outlaw, no doubt, knowing no law but her own passions. She must have been there when he boasted to Laud that he would leave her and marry you. It drove her crazy, and she shot."

"I can understand that—yes," Olga burst forth—"and later she was sorry. I believe it was she who came back and took the body away."

"I hardly see how that theory helps much. How could she take him?"

"Perhaps she may know some secret passage. There might be one underneath. It is a puncheon floor; surely it is not impossible for one block to be loosened and a passage excavated through the earth below. I do not know; yet in what other way could the body have been removed?"

Shelby shook his head gloomily, his eyes searching the floor for any evidence, and finding none. To all appearances, it appeared smooth and solid.

"I don't know," he said. "That idea may be as good as any. You might take this broken knife of mine an' see if you can start anything. What was goin' on out there?"

"Nothing much that I could see. There are men hiding behind the bank of the creek; I think they are Indians, and there may be others off to the right in the weeds."

"Just a guard left there to see we don't get away. They'll wait until dark and then try to burn us out, I reckon; the bucks don't like my shooting. That was a rifle."

"Yes, the bullet struck the log."

He crossed over and looked out anxiously.

"I thought it might be a signal, but I guess not. Don't seem to be anything moving." He straightened up again, his eyes surveying the room. "If we only had two more in this outfit we might give those devils a run for their money. The trouble is we can't defend only two sides, an' they know it; anyhow, Laud does. They'll shoot away here, while the rest of the bucks comes in through the woods an' sets things blazin' back yonder. I'm goin' to haul this bench over on that side; then you can stand up there and shoot through that hole in the window, while I pepper them from here in front. We'll make it hot while it lasts."

She watched him shift the bench and then stood upon it to look out. The sun had gone down, and the valley swam in a purple haze. If she would utilize what little light still remained, she must search at once.

"Nothing out there?"

"I can see nothing moving. It is growing dark. Let me take the knife."

He gave it to her, and she got down upon her knees on the floor, anxiously testing the openings between the blocks with the broken blade. Shelby turned his head occasionally, barely able to distinguish her movements, yet felt little confidence in the success of the effort. Still he realized this was their last and only hope. The cabin was undoubtedly surrounded, and would be made an object of direct attack so soon as it became dark enough to permit the savage assailants to creep up closer unseen. Any attempt at escape through the one door would be suicidal; in all probability, in spite of the silence and seeming loneliness of the scene without, a dozen rifles were even then trained on the entrance, ready to shoot them down the instant either appeared. And there was no other way out, unless it might be through some secret passage existing underground. Macklin had certainly disappeared somewhere; the vanishing of his body was no miracle, and this theory of how it might have been accomplished alone appeared reasonable.

In spite of his doubts, the man held to a measure of hope; nothing else than this remained which he could cling to; their only chance lay in some such discovery. Yet the woman, groping on her knees in the deepening darkness, gave no sign of encouragement. Shelby could bear the strain no longer in silence.

"Is nothing to be found?" he asked anxiously. "No appearance of a trap?"

She lifted her head, with face turned toward him.

"Nothing that I seem able to move," she answered. "I have found a block which does not appear to fit as tightly as the others; I can get the knife blade between, and it doesn't seem to touch any earth below, yet the slab is immovable."

"Let me try my strength."

He started back to join her, but at that instant there came a sudden burst of rifle fire without, bullets thudding into the cabin walls, the sound punctuated by savage yells. Shelby whirled about instantly and dropped to his knees, with eyes peering out through the opening between the logs. Olga also deserted her search and climbed to her post of defense on the bench.

The surrounding darkness enabled them to perceive little—only the flashes of flame cleaving the night, and occasionally the flitting of a dark form in the momentary glare. The firing was continuous and rather heavy, yet the sound of the guns did not seem to indicate advance. The marksmen evidently still remained concealed beneath the protecting bank of the stream, or else skulked in the shadow of the woods. The bullets did no damage, generally finding billet in the solid logs, although a few crashed through the planking of the door. To Shelby by the meaning was sufficiently plain; the real danger lay, as he expected, at the rear; all this noise was being carried on merely to attract their attention. He called across, unable to see his companion, but well aware where she was.

"Don't waste any shot until you see something within range. Those fellows out there are just plugging away blindly. They'll never rush this side. Keep your eyes wide open, though. I'm going back and try to knock off a board from that rear window. If I can get a few shots out there we'll block their little game. Your hear?"

"Yes; I think one or two are crawling closer through those weeds."

"Likely enough; young bucks who can't hold back; keep your eye on them, an' let them have it as soon as you are sure. Call out if you need me."

He groped his way as far as the inner door, helped by the almost continuous flash of the rifles outside; he had even crossed the threshold, his heart choking him as he perceived a glare of red flame, already visible here and there through narrow chinks between the logs. Perhaps he was already too late—those devils had fired the cabin, the licking flames even then beginning to eat into the dry bark. He had no time in which to act, or even think.

Before he might venture another step forward, Olga fired twice rapidly, the flare of her revolver lighting up the entire interior. What followed he scarcely knew; there was a sharp cry, the crash of the overturned bench, and the sound of a body falling heavily on the floor. A revolver went spinning noisily across the room, and then all was still and black once more.

Shelby could see nothing; only the blurred memory of that single instant had seared itself on his brain. She had been shot—his wife; this girl he had learned to love! Some stray shot from an Indian rifle, fired blindly in the dark, had found fatal passage through that broken shutter and struck her down. His first helpless daze changed into a rage for revenge, mingled with a wild yearning that he might yet find her alive. "Olga!" he cried out. "Olga!"

There was no answer, no movement. All was black, soundless; even the rifle fire without had ceased.

He dropped to his knees and crept forward, feeling along the floor with outstretched hands, dreading each instant to touch her body. Suddenly his searching fingers encountered an opening in the puncheon floor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BARRIER OF FLAME.

SHELBY dared not move, except to feel downward into this mysterious opening. Yet he realized instantly what must have occurred—the miracle which had so swiftly disclosed this secret passage. The girl, in falling, had dislodged the very block in the floor she had been endeavoring so vainly to discover. It had suddenly swung downward to the heavy blow of her body, and she had fallen with it into the unknown darkness below. But was she dead or alive? Had the fall stunned her? He drew himself to the very edge, listening. What was down there? Macklin perhaps; the two bodies might be lying there together in a common grave. But wait—something moved surely!

"Olga, speak to me!"

He could not restrain the agony with which he uttered the words. Frightened as she was, dazed by the fall, scarcely conscious even yet, or able to actually comprehend what had occurred, his cry penetrated her mind, brought her back to life.

"Yes, I—I am here, Tom," she managed to say weakly.

"And you are not hurt?" his voice thrilling now with a sudden return of hope.

"Oh, I—I don't know. I cannot even tell what has happened. I stepped back quickly, the bench overturned, and I fell. It is all earth around me—where am I?"

"In the passage beneath the cabin," he explained quickly. "It has been a miracle; your fall opened the trap. Perhaps we may escape from these devils yet. Make room for me to come down; the cabin is already on fire. Is the hole deep?"

"Not very, I think, and there is room."

He lowered himself, but it was not necessary to drop; his feet struck the earth floor, and, as he turned, his hands came in contact with the slab still dangling, just as it had fallen. Obeying the first impulse, aware of a sudden outburst of red flames somewhere above him, he forced the block upward, back into its place, jamming it there with all his strength, until a sharp click convinced him the puncheon again was securely held. They were alone, isolated, in the black depths, underneath the burning cabin, buried deep in the protecting earth. He reached blindly out through the darkness until he touched her, his fingers closing convulsively on a fold of her dress. In the sudden reaction he felt as weak as a child, unable even to control his speech.

"It was God who helped us," he said humbly; "no one else could. You are sure, Olga, you are unhurt?"

"I must be bruised, I suppose; it was an ugly fall, and—and I really think I lost consciousness at first. Then I seemed to hear you call me a long ways off."

"I did call you—twice; it was to the second call you answered. I was wild, for I thought you had been shot. What sort of a place is this we are in?"

"I know nothing. There was light up there, a red glare, before you closed the trap. Is the cabin afire?"

"Yes; those devils started it at the rear. I could see the flames through the clinks between the logs. It was blazing fiercely then; now it must have reached the roof. You can hear the wood crackle even down here, and we must get farther back out of the way. When the roof falls, this part of the floor may go."

In spite of the increasing volume of

flames above, scarcely a glimmer of red light succeeded in penetrating to where they were hidden. A very slight glow found entrance through a narrow crack above them, yet Shelby was compelled to learn their immediate surroundings more by sense of touch than sight. They were in a mere hole scooped out from the soft earth, hardly wider than the trap-door which led to it, the other puncheons of the cabin floor resting solidly upon the ground. The trench led to the right, sinking deeper as it advanced, and, within a foot or two, showing evidence of an earth roof, supported by a rude frame-work. Shelby, leading the way, feeling his passage along inch by inch, was suddenly halted by an earth barrier which seemingly blocked all further progress. Two props had fallen, and with them the weight of earth they supported, leaving a great pile of débris across the passage. He could feel that it did not wholly reach the top, leaving a space there through which it might be possible to crawl.

Yet what would there be beyond? Why should they venture further at present? Laud was outside with his Indians, the whole scene lit up with the glare of flames. They dare not venture to expose themselves. Here they were beyond reach, protected from both flames and savages. Unless some among those assailants knew the existence of this tunnel, or accidentally stumbled upon its outer entrance, they could scarcely be exposed. Even if some one or two found their way in, this barrier of earth would block them, and, if necessary, form the best possible defense.

Undoubtedly Laud's first belief would be that they had perished in the fire, had either been killed, or had killed themselves rather than be captured. He would have no reason to think anything else. Before the débris could be searched for evidence of their fate, the opportunity to creep out unseen, and get away might be far better than at present. Confident that they had perished, and that their charred bodies were lying in the midst of the still-smoking embers of the cabin, there would be no guard watching for an attempt at escape. He reached out and grasped her hand, drawing her down beside him.

"What is it?" she asked in a whisper.

"A fall of earth nearly blocking the passage," he explained, "I can see nothing beyond, so the entrance must be some distance away. I have no idea where the tunnel leads to, and, if I did, we would never dare creep out into the open at present."

"You—you think we had better remain here?"—doubtfully.

"Until the fire dies down; perhaps even longer. Let them believe we died in the cabin; then there may be some chance for us to get away."

"But they will search the ruins?"

"Not for some time; those logs will be glowing embers for hours. That sounded like the roof falling in then. It was—see! It has crushed its way down through the floor. There is a caldron of fire in that hole we just left, but it can't reach us here—only the smoke."

"Will it not show them where we have gone?"

"I hope not; probably the smoking, blazing timbers will choke up the opening, leaving it so filled with partly burned wood as to conceal it entirely. Anyhow, this is our one chance. We would be shot down mercilessly outside."

The glare from the burning rubbish revealed their faces, and the smoke began to swirl past them in clouds, yet did not choke the tunnel, showing there must be an opening somewhere beyond to the outside. Shelby fastened his neckerchief over the girl's nose and mouth, and protected her, as well as himself, by means of his coat. Scarcely conscious of the action they sat thus, their hands clasped, gazing at the leaping figures of flame, and listening to the variety of noises reaching their ears.

The position, while one of brooding horror, did not apparently involve immediate peril. The flames could not reach them, and it was already evident that those dense volumes of smoke, while disagreeable and suffocating, could still be endured. But being cooped up there in that hole under ground, unable to venture forth, choked by the fumes, their faces smarting from the heat, the earth walls holding them in prison, death waiting for them whichever way they

turned, brought a strain to Olga she could no longer combat. Impulsively she clutched the man beside her, her head touching his shoulder, her slender form trembling to a sudden outburst.

"Don't lose your nerve," he whispered, startled by her action. "Nothing can hurt us here."

"Oh, I know; it is not that," the words almost a sob. "I do not think I am really frightened; only—I—I want to feel you near me."

"Me?" he questioned, surprised. "Why, I haven't been much good so far."

"Oh, but you have; you have been splendid. No woman could ever ask more. I want you to know how grateful I am."

"Well, I don't just like that," he protested. "There ain't no cause for you to be grateful, so far as I can see. A man who wouldn't stick with his wife wouldn't be much."

"Are you here just because of that?"

"Well, maybe not altogether. Of course, I'd be here anyhow. I wouldn't go back on no woman who belonged to me. But you ain't just that exactly. I've somehow got to thinkin' a lot about you lately."

"Truly?"

"Sure; there's a heap o' things happened since we was lined up against the wall of that shack down at Ponca. I've found out more what you are than I knew then; an' I reckon you got a better line on me."

"I—I chose you even then."

He laughed awkwardly.

"Out o' that bunch! I don't take that as no great compliment. Say that was the orniest lot o' cattle I ever rode herd over."

"Oh, I don't know," her mood changing into new interest. "There were some among them not so bad. Anyhow, I chose you."

"Maybe you're sorry since?"

"I am not"—firmly. "I never have been. See here, Tom Shelby, I pretty near knew what sort of man you was when I selected you; your face told me that. You thought I just took you so as to get away. Well, maybe I did in a sense, for I would have done almost anything to escape from that life. But I never would have gone with you if I hadn't honestly liked you just the same."

"You did?"

"Yes, I did. There's no reason I shouldn't say so. You said it in the cabin there that you didn't marry me because you knew I had money—that you had no such knowledge. Was that true?"

"Certainly."

"Then why did you marry me?"

His face, burning from the heat of the near-by flames, grew redder if possible with embarrassment. Her eyes were gazing straight at him, insistent of an answer.

"Well, I ain't exactly sure that I know," he admitted reluctantly. "Maybe I sorter sympathized with yer a bit, an' then I got almighty mad at the way them fellows acted. All them things counted, I reckon; but after I went back an' talked with you alone, somehow I naturally felt different—I kinder got to wantin' you myself."

"I knew you did."

"You knew? But I never said nothing like that."

"No; yet I felt the change. I would never have said yes otherwise. You thought me indifferent, cold; but the truth is I rode out to your ranch with you that day secretly happier than I have even been in my life before."

"Olga!" His hand tightened upon hers suddenly.

"Yes," she went on, her eyes now lowered slightly, concealed beneath the long lashes. "I am willing to tell you now. Perhaps we shall never get out of this place alive, and I want to be honest with you for once. Whatever happens I would rather you knew."

"But you cannot mean—"

"It is exactly what I mean, Tom. I love you! Do you care?"

"Care! Why, Olga, girl, I have done nothing but care. I hardly knew what it all meant at first, the way I thought of you. Love came to me like a strange thing. I have led a man's life, and I have known few good women. Even now I cannot wholly realize what has come to me."

He gathered her suddenly into his arms, the neckerchief slipping down about her throat.

"I love you!" he whispered passionately. "Love you, wife of mine."

"And I have given you my heart long ago. Kiss me, Tom."

They sat there, closely pressed together in that narrow space, scarcely aware any longer of the danger at hand, eager only to hear each other's voices. The flames just beyond them died down slightly, yet remained red and angry, occasionally shooting up in fiery billows, lighting their faces. The hole beneath the trap was a mass of embers, totally blocked with charred and blazing wood. Above the crackle of the flames, and the crashing of falling timbers, they could distinguish the intermittent crack of a rifle, and the echo of voices calling. Shelby began to dig with one hand at the pile of earth beside him so as to widen the space between its summit and the roof. The action caused his mind to revert to the imminent peril of their situation.

"It will be all over with before daylight," he said soberly, "and that will be our chance to get out. We can never go the other way, for those logs will hold fire for hours yet."

"How do you suppose Macklin ever got through there?" she questioned wonderingly.

"That's what bothers me. Either he wasn't much hurt, or he had help. It is my notion the girl brought him out in some way. The shooting was an act of sudden anger, for which she was sorry the very next moment. They may be hiding there now, somewhere in the tunnel."

She lifted herself up and peered through the opening; the glare of the flames did not penetrate beyond the barrier of earth, and she saw nothing but impenetrable blackness.

"Shall we go, and see?"

"Not yet; we are safer here, until those devils give up. You can hear their voices yet out there."

They had no way of telling time, and the hours dragged. The flames sank, but the glow of the coals remained, and the litter of charred logs, occasionally flaring into tiny spits of fire. The sound of firing had entirely ceased, and the shouts of voices died away one after the other. They had been very close at one time, as though the

baffled savages were endeavoring to invade the smouldering ruins of the cabin to learn the fate of their victims; but the heat must have prevented any search, for the party drifted away, and did not return. Shelby waited patiently, listening for the slightest sound, but, at last, could restrain himself no longer.

"I do not know how late it is," he said finally, "yet it must be nearly morning. Most of those fellows must be gone. Shall we try our luck, little girl?"

She put her hand silently into his.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FUGITIVES.

HE led the way, finding little difficulty in crawling over the mound of earth, and Olga followed easily. The cool darkness into which they advanced was a great relief, while the sense of action restored their shattered nerves. No gleam of light gave any guidance, nor was there any evidence of immediate approach to the mouth of the tunnel. However, it ran nearly straight, with the grade constantly downward, and they could cautiously feel a way forward, with hands on the earth walls.

They encountered no further obstruction of any kind, but suddenly reached a sharp turn toward the left. Shelby felt his passage around the corner, aware of the pressure of Olga's fingers on his sleeve, but his eyes could perceive nothing unusual beyond. He stared helplessly into a black, soundless void. Yet, with his first step forward, he came to a sudden halt.

"Stay where you are, *señor*," said a low voice. "Not a move till I speak."

He caught his breath quickly, scarcely daring to set down an uplifted foot. There was no doubt who it was that spoke out of the darkness.

"But I am Shelby," he blurted forth swiftly. "You have no reason to fear me."

"Shelby! How came you here? You found the trap? And—and is she with you?"

"Yes, *señorita*. An accident revealed to us a way out. It was you then who took Macklin away; was he not killed?"

A moment there was silence; then she broke out suddenly, passionately, the words fairly falling over each other in her eagerness of expression.

"I am not afraid, Señor Shelby. No! No! I have ze pistol in my hand. I shoot. The dark eet make no difference, for you are there just before me—she an' you are there. Listen then; I tell you what happen. I hate, an' I love—see! Then I make meeystake. Mother of God! I know not how eet was, but I shoot the man I love. It was crazy thing; but I not keel him; I know I not keel him. How I know? Santa Marie! The good God would not let me believe that. What could I do? I ran away mad into the woods. I would maybe yet save heem, but how? You know, *señor*, eet was I who shoot Señor Macklin?"

"Yes, Pancha: the lady here saw your face."

"Yes, it was I, *señor*—I who love heem. Why should it be so? I went there not for that—no! I tell you how it all come. Eet was because of my brother, *señor*—you know my brother, Juan Villemonte? He dead, *señor*, dead. You know how he die? It was a quarrel with Señor Laud, an' Señor Hanley—they keel heem, the two against the one. I not know what happen. I wait in the cabin for Juan to come, but he stay away. No one tell me till an Indian boy came, an' he tell. Then I know Juan is dead, an' I go crazy like that. I am Spanish, *señor*; I hate an' I love—then only I hate! I would avenge my brother; I would keel the man that keeled heem. I care only for to do that. He was there in this cabin; I creep up an' see. It was dark in there, yet I saw his face. He could not see me, but I aimed. Señor Macklin was there, too, an' the other girl, but I care not then for them at all. I hate, an' I see only the one I hate. Merciful God! Why was it so?"

"You shot the wrong man?"

"*Si, señor*. Señor Macklin, he step forward quick just when I fire; he drop an' I run."

Shelby felt Olga grip him, and heard her voice at his ear.

"She never heard what Macklin said; don't let her know."

He crushed the question already on his lips back into his throat.

"Yes," he said, "I see how it happened now. And what did you do then, Pancha?"

She was not sobbing, but her quick breathing gave the impress in the darkness.

"What I do, *señor*? I pray the Virgin that I may save him. Then I remember this passage from the ravine. How I know eet? Juan and I, we live in the cabin a month; 'twas then I found eet. Who made eet I know not; but the thought come to me, just so. I was underneath when you fought, *señor*; then, when you were both outside I got heem—"

"Macklin, you mean? He was alive?"

"Yes, *señor*, alive. Maybe he live, maybe he die; I know not; I do what I can. He help a little, but twice he faint. It took long time; even I carried heem alone."

"But how did you get across that cave-in of earth?"

"Eet was not there; eet come later," she explained. "I would go back, *señor*, when they fired the cabin, but the earth had caved, and I could not get through."

"To help us?"

"*Sí, señor*; to help you, and me. What could I do alone? That is why I tell you; why I talk. Eet is not for you, nor for me. I would save heem, an' only can it be done if I have help. I do all I can—merciful Mother, yes. I bind up the wound; I hold heem while he sleep; I bring heem water from the creek; I hide heem here in the dark. But how I get heem out, *señor*?"

"But why not call the others?" Shelby asked suddenly in suspicion. "What danger is Macklin in?"

"You know not?"—in surprise. "He did not say in the cabin why he came?"

"Who do you mean?"

"Señor Laud. He make no threat?"

"Certainly not; against whom?"

"Señor Macklin. He come for that; I know. The Indian boy told me—he an' Hanley. They plan it all out. 'Twas because Juan would not be one with them, they keel heem. They would hold her for ransom; they say a man comes soon here who would pay much; so they try to put out of the way Señor Macklin. 'Tis to get her that Slagin go to the cabin; he

fail, and then Señor Laud try another way. He not know when he come that Señor Macklin get back. No one know."

Shelby smothered an oath, the whole foul plot suddenly revealed to him in all its hideousness. This then was what these fiends had been planning; it was plot within plot; criminal against criminal. He was blind not to have perceived the truth before; now it stood before him in all its sheer nakedness. Macklin's drunken boast had brought forth its full brood; Hanley, too brainless and cowardly to lead, had told all he knew to Indian Joe—embellished it, no doubt—and it was just the sort of thing the latter was eager to get his hands into—seemingly a safe game, with a good stake.

The girl was helpless, already in their power; all they needed to do was dispose of Macklin. How this was done no one cared; by bribery, by the knife; in the Hole who would ever ask questions? Who would mourn the fellow, whatever happened? And then they would have a free hand. Shelby reached out and drew Olga closer to him in the darkness.

"I understand now," he said tersely, "we've got to fight this out together. All right, I'm ready. What is it you want me to do?"

"You will help me save heem?" the voice from the dark asked eagerly. "You will not try to go away alone, *señor*?"

"No; we are in the same boat, it seems; we'll help each other. You trust me now, Pancha?"

"*Sí, señor*."

"Then let's see what can be done. Can Macklin walk?"

"No, *señor*; I think maybe he verra bad off; he not speak now for long time. Maybe you tell what we do for heem."

"I'm afraid not, Pancha. I've doctored some wounds, but I'm no expert. Where is he lying? Oh, here."

He bent down in the dark, and touched the motionless figure. The man's flesh was warm, from fever doubtless, and his breathing was unusually heavy. His fingers sought the man's pulse, which showed weak, but rapid.

"Where was the wound?"

"In the right chest, *señor*."

"And you have washed and bandaged it?"

"Yes, *señor*; the best I could. I tore up my underskirt."

"Do you know if he bled much?"

"Not since I found him—no; eet was very little. Before I think, yes; there was a pool of blood on the floor in which he lay." Her voice trembled. "You think maybe he live, *señor*?"

"I am unable to answer that, Pancha," he replied soberly, rising to his feet. "The man is evidently hard hit, weak from loss of blood, and in a coma now from fever. This is no place for him. If we could get him out into the open, bandage his wound properly, and get a doctor to probe for the ball, he might have a fair chance. I can say no more than that."

"A doctor! Where would there be a doctor?"

"I know of none this side of Gerlasche; an army surgeon is at the camp there: no doubt he would come."

"Gerlasche! And—and he could save him, *señor*?"

"He might; I can promise nothing; but that would be the only hope."

"But you will help me? You pledge that?"

"I will do whatever I can," Shelby said earnestly. "I hardly know how we are going to manage it. Still Macklin is not very big, or heavy, and, while he is bound to be a dead weight, I am sure I could carry him for a while. Once outside we might find some poles, rig up a litter, and so get along, the three of us."

"Yes," interposed Olga sympathetically. "we must do that if possible. He cannot be left to die alone in this horrible place. I am strong, and will help all I can. Could we not start at once?"

"Just a moment. Is there an entrance not far away, Pancha?"

"Not fifty feet, *señor*."

"Then we ought to hear any firing or shouting without. Everything seems quiet. It must be nearly morning, and the Indians have probably scattered, believing us burned in the cabin. Let's make the effort now."

He sent the Mexican girl on in advance,

and lifted the unconscious Macklin upon his back, Olga partially supporting the helpless body. The wounded man groaned at the first movement, but lapsed immediately into silence again, and Shelby moved slowly forward with his burden along the dark, narrow passage. It terminated in a small hole, well protected by a covert of brush, through which the fellow had to be drawn cautiously.

Once on the outside, under the cold gleam of the stars, they found themselves protected by the high banks of a gully, that turned sharply to the left, connecting with a deeper ravine. The night was solemnly still, with a slight glow to the sky overhead as though day was about to dawn. The three clustered close, and listened, but no sound broke the stillness. Satisfied they were not observed, Shelby again picked up the wounded man, and, with Pancha guiding, her figure barely discernible in the gloom, slowly advanced down the depression.

It was hard, slow work, as Shelby had to carefully pick his way among the stones, seeking a safe resting-place for each foot. They must move noiselessly; the slightest misstep might arouse alarm, as some of the savages might be lurking anywhere in that darkness. Their only hope lay in the confidence the Indians felt in their death within the cabin. If they were assured as to this, then they had probably scattered, willing to wait until morning to search the débris for their bodies. But this they couldn't know.

As they turned into the ravine they obtained a glimpse of the burned cabin. One wall yet stood, ragged against the sky, and there was a gleam of red embers. Occasionally a gust of air sent sparks flying upward, and spirals of black smoke were visible. No moving forms could be perceived, however, about the ruins, and it was evident the spot was still in a condition to render exploration impossible.

Huddled closely together in the shelter of the rocks the fugitives stared across the open space at the red gleam. Shelby, clinging to his burden, felt the tightening pressure of Olga's hand, as she nervously touched him. The Mexican girl had lifted

herself upon a projecting stone, and was searching the shadows with keen eyes.

"Where do we go?" he questioned, and she instantly turned her head at the low murmur of his voice.

"Up the rock trail, *señor*; there is no other safe place."

"So I thought. Then we must get under cover before daylight. Dawn is not far off, from the looks of the sky." He paused suddenly. "What kind of a looking guy is Hanley?"

"He tall, scrawny, red whiskers."

"Then I got him; plugged the fellow through the arm. He won't want any more for a while. Come, let's move on," he added impatiently. "It's doing no good to remain here and stare at that fire, and it is no light load I've got on my back."

The way was a rough one, strewn with stones, but well protected by high banks on either side. Pancha seemingly knew every inch of it, for she advanced confidently, selecting the easier path. The light from the slowly graying sky overhead scarcely penetrated the depths of the ravine, yet Shelby could follow her figure, and toiled steadily forward, bending low under his unconscious burden. So they came to the end of the cleft, where it terminated at the bank of the creek.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SECURITY OF THE CAVE.

THE events of the next hour remained in Shelby's mind more like some terrible dream than a remembrance. He was conscious of being excessively worn, hungry, tired. His mind did not function, yet he clung doggedly to his task, with teeth clenched, and every muscle aching from the effort. His load grew heavier with every step, and at times he stumbled like a drunken man through sheer weakness. Macklin moaned once or twice, but without regaining consciousness, and twice Shelby felt compelled to lay the wounded man on the ground, while he regained sufficient strength to proceed. Once they endeavored to shift the burden, Olga insisting on helping him to bear the man. But this proved imprac-

ticable, and again Shelby shouldered the body, and staggered blindly up-stream.

The sky was gray, a heavy mist shrouding the valley below, when they finally attained the opening into the trail sought. Nothing could be seen of their enemies, and, convinced that, as yet, there was no pursuit, the three crept breathlessly into the shadow of the bushes, dragging the unconscious Macklin with them. For some minutes Shelby lay motionless, struggling for breath, feeling that all strength had deserted him. He scarcely realized that Olga had lifted his head into her lap, and was wiping the beads of perspiration from his face. At last, however, his eyes opened, and he saw her bending over him. The man's lips broke into an effort to smile.

"Some soft, ain't I, little girl?" he muttered. "But, gee, that was a pull, and I was about all in. Where's Pancha?"

"Back there, where she can look out. Is it much further?"

"To the cave, you mean? Yes, it is a hard climb yet, but we will have it easier. I'll be all right presently; we'll cut some stakes, and make a litter. No one can see us from below, the rest of the way."

"I don't know what is the matter with me," he apologized, ashamed of his weakness. "Hungry and overstrained, I guess. That was about the hardest job I ever tackled. Maybe I ought to have left the fellow there."

"Oh, no, Tom! We couldn't do that. The poor thing is nearly crazed."

"Pancha? Yes, I know; but she'd be a heap sight better off with the guy dead. He has only been playing with her."

"But she will not believe that. She thinks it is all her fault, and—and she is such a wild, passionate little thing. I would do anything to save him for her."

"There is about one chance in a thousand. Still he's just about ornery enough to make it. We sure don't owe him anything."

"I am not certain of that," she said softly. "I wonder when I would have known my husband, but for him?"

"You said that almost as though you meant it."

"Do I not? What do my eyes say?"

"They are very happy; they are not the same eyes I saw first in Pancha."

"They never will be the same eyes again. They see a very different world. I doubt if you half believe all I confess to you now."

"I can scarcely realize it is true, but belief is not absent."

The motionless girl at the end of the rock suddenly turned her head, and glanced back at them.

"*Señor*, is it true that you love her—your wife?"

"True; of course, Pancha. I told you so, even before I told her."

"An' she love you?"

"I am *Señor* Shelby's wife, Pancha," spoke up Olga quickly, a flush burning red on her cheeks, "I have no other ambition."

"But the money! You rich? He say that, *Señor* Macklin. You not even care for that?"

"Not very much—no. I know nothing about it, and am perfectly content if it never comes. You must know what I mean—you have loved."

"Yes, *señor*; I have loved, and would still love; money is nothing. *Señor*—"

"Yes, Pancha."

"I think as I lie here what it was best to do. They stir down there. I cannot see yet for the fog, but I hear sounds. Pretty soon they will know, perhaps. Yet they will not be able to tell what has happened. We come here unseen; they know nothing of me, nothing of *Señor* Macklin; but they hunt the burned cabin an' find no bone, no flesh. What will they do?"

"Laud will suspect the truth; he is a fox."

"Tis so, perhaps; yet I believe we left no trail, *señor*. It was all rock an' water; even the Sioux cannot follow that. You know the way now?"

"To the cave—yes."

"It is safe. But if the *señor* lives he must have a doctor. You tell me that, and there is but one way; I must ride."

Shelby straightened up, instantly grasping her purpose.

"You mean you will leave us here to go on alone?"

"Yes, *señor*; it is best. They will not stop me; they will not know. Unless I meet

Señor Laud there is no danger; perhaps even he will not suspect, or interfere. There are horses there, and I ride often—sometimes even up onto the mesa; no one will care what I do. Is not that the best way, *señor*?"

"You are sure you can pass?"

"I am sure I will pass," she said firmly. "I ride for hees life, *señor*."

It was the better plan, nor could Shelby deny the probability of its success. She was trusted by that wild crew of white and red renegades; she had been one of them. No one, unless possibly it might be Laud, or Hanley, had any reason to suspect her now. It was a long journey to Gerlasche, too long to be made on foot, and if the girl went with them up the trail, every effort at rescue would be delayed. She had chosen the one quick course to pursue.

"You are right, Pancha," he admitted. "We'll get him up there some way. But you better go now, before the fog rises."

"Yes, *señor*."

She came over and knelt beside Macklin, who was moaning slightly, his head resting on a pillow made by Shelby's coat. His face appeared drawn and haggard in the weird, gray light. As she bent over him his eyes partially opened, but with no light of intelligence in them; they were dull, lusterless.

"*Señor, señor*," she sobbed, pressing his hand between both her own. "I am going to ride for you."

Some angel of mercy must have put the words on his lips, for certainly he knew her not, yet faint, fitful, there came from his lips the cry.

"Pancha! I want you, Pancha!"

She must have understood, known, and yet the comfort of that call was hers.

She looked at him dry-eyed, motionless; then bent and kissed his lips. Slowly, regretfully she arose to her feet, and faced them, her cheeks white.

"Tis all," she said simply. "Now I go."

She vanished without a sound, gliding through the fringe of bushes, and down the steep bank to the protection of the creek. Once they caught glimpse of her below, but only to lose sight once more among the swirling clouds of vapor which yet con-

sealed the lower valley. They were alone, but with their own work to do. Shelby went at his with quiet efficiency. The sooner they were on their way the better, but he had already planned the easier method by which he meant to transport the wounded man.

Selecting two stout limbs, similar in size and length, he ran these through the arms of his stout corduroy jacket, binding them into position by two cross-pieces, hastily prepared, and lashed firmly with strips torn from his neckerchief. Macklin was now lifted gently onto the outspread coat, his limbs upheld by one of the cross-bars, and then the jacket buttoned securely about him, forming a swinging cradle finely adapted for the purpose. Shelby straightened up, quite himself again.

"There, that will answer nicely," he said confidently. "It is bound to be a hard climb, but we'll take our time to it, and rest when we are tired. No one can see us from below after we once pass the point yonder."

"Is the trail up-hill all the way?" asked the girl, her eyes searching the steep face of the bluff.

"Yes, pretty sharp at times, but we'll manage. It follows a deep cleft through the rocks, and once found cannot be lost. I'll take this end; that will give me the most of the weight, and you lead the way; take it slowly, and you'll be all right."

They picked the litter up between them, Olga relieved to discover how lightly, thus distributed, her share of the burden rested upon her. She was able to advance easily, and pick her way among the rocks without experiencing great discomfort. The weight of the man's body came far heavier upon Shelby, but the rest and change had largely restored his strength, and he felt no doubt of his ability to sustain his end of the burden. Unable to see just where he was placing his feet in the stony path, he stumbled occasionally, causing the wounded man to groan in some sudden spasm of pain, yet it was evident he did not suffer greatly. The trail they followed had so impressed itself on his memory, he recalled every turn clearly, and could call out directions to her in a low voice.

"Turn sharply to the right there; we will have to hold the litter higher to get by that rock; here is the only point exposed; once in the shadow of those trees the way is completely covered. Yes, we can move rapidly around this point; from now on there are rocks on both sides. Take it easy, and if you need to rest, say so."

The burden grew perceptibly heavier as they toiled upward, and several times they put Macklin down, while they flung themselves on the rocks to regain breath for a fresh effort. The altitude began to effect Olga, her heart beating rapidly from exertion, but she struggled on, determined not to yield. Shelby, noting the whiteness of her face, insisted on frequent periods of rest, so that they were over an hour in attaining the rock platform abutting on the cave.

Getting Macklin's helpless body over that last high stone rampart proved to be the most difficult task of all, and was only accomplished by sheer strength, Shelby hanging downward, with limbs braced against the rock, and slowly drawing the inert body up by the muscles of his arms, assisted, to some extent, by the efforts of the girl beneath. Once safely behind the cover of the stone parapet, they lay panting with exhaustion.

However, this was a bodily weariness soon ministered unto. Shelby, refusing to let Olga attempt any more, drew the wounded man back into the greater security of the cave, and made him as comfortable as possible. Then, although still breathing heavily himself, he hastily gathered together what food remained from his store of the day before, and took this out to share with her. They sat in the open, just outside the narrow entrance to the cave, where, by lifting their heads, they could look over the parapet into the deep chasm of the valley.

It had begun to snow, in large, swirling flakes, thickly enough to blot out completely the scene beneath, leaving them perched high above its vortex, as though they lived in another world. The white curtain gave them a sense of isolation, of security, which helped immeasurably to restore their courage. They were beyond all probability of pursuit, free from immediate peril; shut off from any discovery.

All that remained was to wait patiently the return of Pancha with help. The wind kept the platform-free from snow, hurling it down into the deep gorge, powdering the trail they had just traveled, and thus completely obliterating any signs of their passage. Yet the gray gloom weighed heavily on the girl.

"How long will it take her?" she asked.

"Pancha? Oh, she can hardly get back before late to-night. It is a hard ride, even if she meets with no accident. My only fear is she may encounter Laud."

"You do not think she will attempt to return alone?"

"Not if she brings the doctor. I said nothing, for I did not believe it necessary. He will never venture into this Hole without an escort, and a reasonably strong one. I am hoping she encounters some party out scouting which will make a trip to Gerlasche unnecessary. Since the fight out yonder, troops must be searching the bad lands for renegade Indians. They would only be too glad to discover some guide who would lead them here."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

"But surely they know of this place."

"They know of it; yes, in a way. They possess full information as to its existence. But to get in here is quite another matter. Without a competent guide they might hunt for weeks, and, if they did discover the trail through some accident, the game would be gone. Only a sudden dash will ever round that outfit up; they will have to be hit front and rear, and with no small force."

He looked out into the cloud of snow, seeking vainly to penetrate the curtain.

"The Lord only knows how many savage devils there are down there now," he said soberly. "I don't think there was much of a bunch when I first came in—mostly white outlaws, cattle-thieves, and scum of that kind; but, since the fight, Indians have been coming, a slew of 'em, young bucks who got away. They'll be desperate and crazed. What was that? That noise?"

"It came from the cave. Perhaps it was Macklin."

They were both upon their feet, startled by the strange sound. Shelby bent down and crept in through the entrance.



Diana and Morris Turk

CENSOR 163 did not like his job. It was bad enough that a leg, broken by football, kept him out of active service; but to sit at a desk doing woman's work was adding insult to injury. Heads of departments, however, are seldom open to conviction; and 163 was kept on his job.

At first, he had hailed the change from pure routine work, which he had been doing,

with enthusiasm. At least, he thought, he would experience the glory of war at second hand; and he pictured himself, a welcome guest, retailing incidents and events spiced with the real flavor of gunpowder and the added interest of mystery. "Of course" he fancied himself saying, "I can't tell the place where it happened or the name of the boat, but--" and he saw his auditors nod-

ding approval and hanging on his words in breathless suspense.

His first morning's work brought the rude realization that it was outgoing mail he was to handle—letters from the land of peace and prosperity to those in the service abroad. The news contained was purely personal and the only knowledge he gained was that of the eternal monotony of human nature.

After a week's work he subdivided all letters, mentally, into "male" and "female" classes. The former, written by members of either sex, were in the minority. They were brief, but usually required a lot of censoring, for they persisted in giving the whereabouts of "good old Bill and the Sixty-first," or stating well-authenticated rumors about peace negotiations and the end of the war. The female class he subdivided into "mothers", "sweetharts", or "wives" letters, and could easily place them by certain stereotyped phrases that they always contained.

The first asked solicitously about food and underwear, and—"My darling boy, who darns your socks?" The second had usually some sort of an apology to himself. "I know the censor will see this, but no censor in the world will keep me from telling you how much I love you." And then, casually tucked away somewhere near the end: "Are the French girls so very pretty?" The wives' letters told of purely domestic adventures and were the most drearily monotonous of all.

So 163 was righteously indignant at the departmental injustice that hid his light under the bushel of red tape and kept a man of initiative at a task that any fool could fill. One day, out of a clear sky, came a letter—so different from the rest; so clear and refreshing in tone that, despite the ennui that comes from repletion, 163 found time to read it again and envy the lucky fellow to whom it was sent.

It began:

MY DEAREST BETTER HALF:

Yes, I had my bad quarter of an hour yesterday when your train pulled out. Everything looked black and gloomy when I left the station, and for five minutes I didn't love God, and the birds sang awful. All of a sudden I remembered the little package you tucked in my hand at the

last moment, and I opened it, to find your dear old face smiling up at me. I never could resist your smile, so I smiled back through my tears. Then the sun came out; and the birds sang; and I shrugged my shoulders and said aloud, "*C'est la guerre,*" to the amazement of the station porter, who, I am sure, would have called a Bellevue ambulance had I lingered longer in his vicinity. So I powdered my nose and pursued my way in peace.

Here was a change from the eternal sameness of things. He had just come to the conclusion that all human beings lived and thought just alike and there was nothing new under the sun, when, from out of the mass of innane correspondence which surrounded him, this letter appeared. He read it again; examined the handwriting—clear, legible, bold; looked at the address—"Lieutenant C. E. Gravely." Lucky dog! Had his commission and gone across. Of course, girls are crazy about uniforms. "Girl! Why," thought 163, "she's his wife. Calls him her better-half. I wonder how long they've been married?" and he fell into such a brown study that the man at the next desk asked: "What's the matter, Dalton? Found a new cipher code?" Dalton only shook his head and sighed.

That week brought two more letters in the same tone. One gave a sprightly description of a Red Cross Bazaar.

All sorts of garments, surely made for survivors of the battle-field, not for the general public, were on display. At least, that's how they looked, for they were fearfully and wonderfully fashioned. Some were evidently made for giants. Some looked as if they might fit the class of 1940 if they were called soon. One woman actually sent a sweater with one sleeve. Maybe she ran out of wool; but I call it carrying preparedness to an extreme, eh? Handkerchiefs as big as a postage stamp, of no earthly use to any one with a decent-sized cold, were sold by Frisky Fluff of the Follies for five dollars each. Men came to blows (literally and figuratively) over them. One old organ-grinder came in with a new dollar bill "to buy a liberty bomb for the Germans."

Censor Dalton smiled and then frowned over the following:

Went for a long tramp yesterday, old top, all on my lonesome. But I made believe you were with me, and took the old Aqueduct Road. Do you remember our last hike there? The time we were lost—two babes in the woods—and went dinnerless until nightfall? Every one we met said the village was a quarter of a mile further on,

till we felt as if we were on a treadmill or chasing a mirage. They were the good old palm days, weren't they? Now you're treading strange paths, perhaps. Well, look at everything twice, once for yourself and once for me.

What fellow wouldn't like a girl like that? Dalton pictured her—tall, slender, athletic, so different from the writers of those other letters. They were silly, gushing schoolgirls or sentimental old maids, most of them. "Jolliers," that's what they were. The letter in his hand, however, had plenty of affection in it. It was warm and alive; but there was a certain restraint, a little reticence that only added zest to what was really expressed. Doubtless, Gravely could read much between the lines. At the thought, Dalton grabbed his pencil and savagely pounced on the next letter, ready to wreck his censorial wrath on the first innocuous sentence he came across.

Three days went by with no more of these letters, and it seemed to Dalton that those which passed through his hands were more deadly dreary than ever. He began to worry lest the looked-for blue envelope with the uncompromising, bold chirography had gone through some other channel. Then he caught sight of it in the morning mail, and the tremendous heart-beat that followed his discovery made him pause and consider.

"Am I crazy," he thought, "going mad over the letters of a woman that I've never seen? Most likely, she's old and scrawny, and—well, she's married, anyway."

A censor should be a machine. Gosh! he knew all that, but a fellow was only human. Somehow these letters had taken a hold on his imagination. The style was so interesting. That is, he was interested from a purely literary point of view. Having thus salved his conscience, he tore open the envelope and, while the rest of the mail lay undisturbed, he read it once—again.

DEAR OLD THING:

Of course I miss you. Mother misses you; the cat misses you; but what's the use saying so? You should have known better than to ask us if we did, 'cause we don't want to tell you that. We want to tell you the news; and if there isn't any news, I'm going to make some up. So you needn't believe anything I write unless you want to.

I started to school again yesterday, and it certainly is good to be back on the job. One must

keep busy nowadays. No time for thought, that's the best plan. The kids seem glad to see me again. I have one adorable little Italian who can't speak English. Her name, as far as I could understand it, is "Kawky." So I asked, in an effort to elucidate, "What does mother call you?" And she replied, "Mam, she say, 'Kaw-kee-eel you lill' dam fool, Kaw-kee-ee!"

"Brave, that's what she is!" thought Dalton; "grit clear through. Gone to work and making the best of it. No, she can't be old. I wonder where she lives." He looked at the envelope and tucked in the corner was the return address—"M. E. Gravely, 620 South Boulevard, Larchfield."

Larchfield was a little suburb not far away. He had passed through it many times, and he remembered its flower-hung porches and neat trimmed lawns. Was her home like that? He tried to picture it, and then he began to wonder what she looked like. Was she light or dark, tall or short? One thing he was sure of, her eyes would be bright and smiling. But why conjecture? He shook his shoulders as if to shake off the thought of her—a woman he had never met, never could meet. But no matter what he tried to do, Mary Gravely—her name, her fancied face or a phrase from her letter, would keep popping up at the most inopportune moments.

In the days that followed the infatuation seemed to grow. If he walked in a crowd it was to scan each face and figure, to wonder if she looked like that. If he heard a cheerful laugh he wheeled and stared rudely at the perpetrator, thinking: "Her laugh would sound like that." He wanted to be alone. He wanted to think of her. There was no doubt about it, the woman obsessed him. He began to think of her, day and night, to dream of her, to envy the lieutenant—almost to hate him.

The cheerful tone of the letters continued, even parties were mentioned.

Only women were there, because all the men worth while in our crowd have gone across.

Then, one day, he ran across a bit of jingle, invaluable for the information that it conveyed to him:

My hair is still red,
My eyes are still blue,
Best of all, my dear—
I still love you.

Now he had something definite to go on. He stared at every red-headed woman he met, but none of them came up to his idea of her, and he decided that probably she seldom came to town. One day the wild idea of a trip to Larchfield took possession of him. He persuaded himself that he needed more exercise and was sick of the city streets. He took the short-train trip and soon found himself in the little village. Street signs interested him strangely, and his heart gave an inexplicable bounce when he saw on one "Boulevard, South." He glanced at numbers on the houses—"295" he read. Then "297," and, without giving himself any reason for his preference, he crossed the street and began walking in the opposite direction.

Up ran the numbers, 300—302. As they increased so did his gait and respiration. He passed 400—500—600, then stopped short. There it was—620! A quaint little stucco house, with love-in-a-mist and clematis climbing all over the little porch. Just the sort of home he would have imagined hers to be. Then, feeling that his standing still might be conspicuous, although there were few passers-by on this quiet Sunday afternoon, he walked to the further end of the block, turned and slowly retraced his steps. In passing by he scanned the windows. They were shut and all the blinds were drawn tight. The place had a silent, not-at-home appearance. His heart stood still. What could have happened? He hurried back to town, thinking of all sorts of horrible possibilities—sickness or worse. He couldn't read or eat; and when he went to bed he tossed sleepless through the entire night.

Next morning he rose at daybreak, and was in his office before the scrub-woman had finished her matutinal job. He hung around the corridors, smoking cigarette after cigarette. He greeted the well-meant inquiries of his colleagues with a curt explanation of insomnia and nervousness. The good-natured jesting that answered him only made him the more irritable. Finally, however, the mail was distributed; and the next moment found him sorting it with feverish eagerness that ceased the moment his fingers touched the familiar blue en-

velope. He opened it quickly, and a smile of relief covered his face as he read.

We are going to spend every week-end with Maude now. It will be a change for me and a relief for mother.

Dalton sat back and called himself a fool and other appropriate epithets; but he was so happy, the tension had been so great, that he hadn't the heart to reprove himself for his folly. He determined, however, to make no more trips of investigation, but to confine his attention solely to the letters, which surely could do no harm.

This went on serenely for a few weeks, and then the letter to Lieutenant Gravely was addressed "Base Hospital 147." He was ill with an attack of trench-fever and the anguish, the longing in each line wrung Dalton's heart. There was a pitiful effort to be brave, but through it all rang the protest against separation. She wrote:

Oh, my dearest! I'm not afraid for you. I know you'll get well; but I want to be with you, to sit beside you and fan you, and turn your pillow. I know it's selfish of me, for you are probably taken care of in a better way than mine, but I want to be with you—oh, so much.

The next day's letter contained an enclosure that Dalton would have given a year's salary to keep. It was the photograph of a bright-faced, happy-looking girl of about twenty, and across its back was written: "Your Mary's come to keep you company." Thereupon Censor 163 did an unheard of, unprofessional thing. He wrote a letter of his own to the lieutenant, explaining that he had heard of Lieutenant Gravely's illness, but not saying how. He inquired as to the officer's health, and commended him to a friend of his who was a physician in Base Hospital 147. Then Dalton wrote to the doctor and asked his special services for the sick man. After both letters were duly stamped and mailed he sat back, and alternately cursed himself for a fool, and thanked his lucky stars for the chance that enabled him to render her a service.

Answers came from both patient and physician. The former contained the welcome and unwelcome news that he was being invalided home.

"I am leaving to-morrow and I can never forget your kindness, my unknown friend," Gravely wrote.

"I live very near your city," was the superfluous information, "and I hope that some time you will call and enable me to thank you in person."

First Dalton told himself that he had better stay away; then, that it was churlish not to go.

The next day a belated letter from her settled the question. She wrote:

I'll be so glad to have you back, and my heart is jumping for joy with every beat. I'm so glad you were sick; gladder that you are better; gladdest of all that you will be unfit for service for a while, and we can be together again. Am I a pig? No, only a fond and foolish woman. How wonderful everything has been. Think of a perfect stranger being so nice to you. Who is that Mr. Dalton? He said he had heard of you, but did not mention the name of your mutual friend. Anyway, I'm sure he's very nice, and you must see and thank him when you are home.

On reading this, Dalton straightway mounted to the seventh heaven of delight until impatience brought him back to earth. Thereafter he besieged the War Department daily for information as to the day and hour of Lieutenant Gravely's return; and found out, for the first time, how well the government guards its secrets. No one could or would tell him when and where transports with wounded men were due to arrive, so he had to draw his own conclusions. He calculated that it would take two weeks to get over, one week for recuperation; and then he yielded entirely, and wrote to congratulate the lieutenant on his return, and ask him when he could receive visitors.

An immediate reply showed him he was welcome, but now the days dragged! Surely there were seventy days in the week and each was forty-eight hours long till Sunday came. Finally he stood in front of 620 S. Boulevard—and his heart failed him. "Journeys end in lovers' meetings," but his, alas! must end in—nothing. It was the end of a dream. The little path in front of him led to the door of disillusionment. The odor of the late roses seemed funereal.

He feared his visit would lead to questions. Then must come explanations, but no one need know of his day-dreams. He

could say how he admired Mary's wisely devotion, how sorry he felt for the separation of so devoted a couple. He'd rub that in, so they would never suspect his ulterior motive. So he squared his shoulders and walked bravely to the threshold. The little tinkle of the bell had hardly died away when the door opened and there she stood!

More radiant, more alive, more vivid than his brightest dreams. Curling, red hair, bright blue eyes, all of her radiated vitality. His head swam. He reached for the door-jamb and, grasping it, managed to gasp: "Lieutenant Gravely?"

"Yes—do come in! Mr. Dalton, isn't it?"

Dalton nodded.

"He's expecting you," the pleasant voice continued. "In here, please," and she opened the door.

Mechanically Dalton hung up his hat and followed; and then, for the second time, his senses almost forsook him. There in a long chair before him was a tall, very thin, young man. Very, very thin, very pale, but—his hair was red and curly; his eyes were blue and bright; and, in spite of his evident weakness, he was very much alive. He stretched out a thin hand to Dalton and said:

"Oh, Mr. Dalton, excuse my not getting up! I'm still a bit of an invalid." Then, waving a hand toward her, he said: "Meet my sister, Miss Gravely." Dalton's few remaining senses immediately left him, and he could only hold tightly to the hand she extended and stare and stare. He never heard the pretty, grateful speech she made to him. He stood in embarrassed silence till Lieutenant Gravely broke in.

"Let him sit down, sis. I want to talk, too. You see," he added, "we always want to do the same thing at the same time, being twins."

"Yes," laughed Mary, "I call him my better-half."

And, though Dalton was to make the most important speech of his life in that very room several weeks later, his first remark was exactly two words, but they burst the restraint of months and sounded in his ears like a paean of thanksgiving:

"I understand," he said.



Tribute by

H. F. Grinstead

OLD JIM RUDISILL had been a long time on the Rio Grande. He owned a ranch of ten thousand acres that lay in a bend on the Texas side. The river ran west on his northern boundary line, and farther south it turned east to mark the southern limit of his possessions, so that he had Mexico on three sides of him.

The Mexicans may have looked longingly toward the fat cattle and swift-gaited horses, but they had never dared make a raid across the shifting channel. The old ranchman was noted for his averseness to parting with his money.

"No, I'll be dadburned if I buy any Liberty bonds!" he had exclaimed once when approached on the subject. "Protection, thunder! I can hold my own right across there among the greasers—wouldn't care if I was on that side, if I've got to have the life pestered out of me here!"

At sundown of a day in early spring, Pink Rogers, the ranch foreman, rode up.

"River's risin'," he announced briefly.

"That so?" the ranch owner queried with little interest. "Too late for a big rise, I reckon."

Too late or not, it was a big rise. Before dark the river was almost bank-full.

The next morning water covered the low ground a mile to the east of the ranch-house, cutting its way across the neck of land to the river where it turned back like a horseshoe. The Rudisill ranch was on an island!

Before night the river began to fall, and

twenty-four hours later was almost down to normal stage; but the new channel it had cut across the bend remained full. Jim Rudisill saddled his horse and rode to the west. Here he found a huge sand-bar blocking the old channel, down which flowed a trickle of water that might have been crossed at a step.

The Rudisill ranch was in Mexico!

"Well, by heck!" Old Jim muttered. "It's a fool law that makes the channel of a river the boundary line; but I guess I don't care. Taxes will be lower, maybe."

Old Jim Rudisill was at dinner three days later when a dozen Mexican rurales rode up to the gate. The alert captain of the soldiers knew his business, which he kept to himself until after he had dinner.

"It is the customs duty, *señor*," the officer imparted graciously, as he rolled his after-dinner cigarette. "You have the cattle, I think two thousand, and of horses perhaps a hundred. I am sent to collect the duty that must be paid when you bring them into Mexico."

"The devil and Tom Walker!" Old Jim exploded. "You don't think I tried to smuggle over a whole ranch? It ain't my fault if I'm in your measly old republic!"

"It is the law, *señor*; I cannot say. Your cattle and horses were in the Estados Unidos, now they are in Mexico; the duty must be paid."

"Oh, come now!" Old Jim wheedled. "How about a hundred pesos for you and the same for the alcalde? I know him—Manuel Chaves."

"No, *señor*; Chaves was a Científico, and has been executed a long time now. Remember, there is no bribery; the military now rules—we protect you," and the young Mexican drew himself up proudly.

"I am ordered to take *diezmo* from the cattle and horses if the money is not paid," he explained.

"Jumpin' Jupiter! Take a tenth for duty? Why, confound it, I never heard of payin' more 'n a dollar a head either way!"

"That was when cattle were but ten dollars a head—they are worth fifty and more now. As to the law, it is too slow—the military acts quickly."

In spite of all the threats and curses he could utter in Spanish and English, separately and combined, Old Jim witnessed the departure of two hundred of his fattest beefeves and at least ten of his best horses, driven away by the shrewd young officer and his command.

As if adding insult to injury, the Mexican soldiery patrolled the bank of the new river channel every day. They allowed nothing to be molested, but commandeered such horses as they needed, paying the ranchman his own price—in their worthless currency.

For the next three weeks Jim Rudisill fumed and cursed. He even threatened to desert his ranch and move his cattle across the river; but the mild-mannered official informed him one day that by special order the military government had forbidden the exportation of cattle for the present.

The river became a mere ribbon in the broad sands; the dry season was at hand. And one night the ranch wagon came in with a load of supplies. Queer-looking lumps showed in sacks of flour, while a roll of blankets was strangely heavy.

"It was the willows on this bank that started the trouble," the foreman had confided to his boss.

So for three days the men worked, shearing the growth from the bank at the turn. Old Jim Rudisill, apparently reconciled to his change of allegiance, began to build a fence along the dry channel of the old riverbed.

Some of the post-holes he dug deep beyond reason. When the men worked late, queer-looking bundles, as of short sticks,

were planted, with a cord leading outward and hidden in the dry sand.

Other deep holes were dug in the sandbar that had been cast up as a barrier to the old channel, and they too were filled with mysterious packages.

The willow-brush had been weighted down at the turn toward the new channel, and already the sand that had drifted over them showed in the shallow water.

One night when Pink Rogers unsaddled his horse at the corral, he remarked:

"River's risin'."

It was the summer rain, and there would be no more than a foot of water, but it was enough.

In the middle of the night the rangers at their camp ten miles up the river heard a dull rumble that might have been taken for distant artillery. The Mexican rurales from the other side of the Rio Grande raised from their blankets and listened. Five reports they counted, then a blend as of contending armies.

At daylight when they cautiously approached the river, a widening stream of muddy water coursed along the old channel, cutting its way deeper and deeper into the soft sand, while a mountain of sand was scattered on either side of the break that two hundred pounds of exploding dynamite had torn in the bar.

Old Jim Rudisill and half a dozen cowboys stood on the bank and derisively invited the Mexican constabulary to come over into the land of Uncle Sam. The east channel had been effectively blocked by blowing off a section of the bank, and now a new bar was rapidly filling in.

When the sun was two hours high, seven khaki-clad horsemen rode across from the Texas side dry shod. A civilian accompanied them.

"I am the deputy collector of customs from this district, Mr. Rudisill," the stranger explained when he had dismounted. "I am willing to accept your inventory of the stock you recently transferred from Mexico to the United States, and you may pay the import duties on that basis."

"Well, I'll be—" For once in his life, Old Jim Rudisill longed for a cuss word strong enough to express his feelings.

Prince, Potentate or Potato



by Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.

AS the plump Virginia matron who was his wife hit him with the dish-towel, she said in her exasperation: "Go 'way from me, man!" Then, to astound the powers above with this thing, she addressed the kitchen rafters. "Thinking," she said, "I have time to kiss a Frenchman!"

The Frenchman was himself. After twenty years the county still spoke of him as the Frenchman. There was no other. To his face he was, of course, Mr. Goslin, although he pronounced it with another flavor and wrote it Guesclin. Otherwise there was not the least strangeness about him. He was a neighbor like anybody else, and a warmly esteemed one. He might just as well have been a Virginian, which shows how used to him everybody was. It was even so eight years before, when, after twelve years of light-hearted and prosperous trucking in the rich Norfolk sand, he married the daughter of the overlanded farmer from whom he had rented and then bought his first acres. The event disturbed no sensibilities of the native born. Besides, they had grown accustomed to the idea. Sally Fitz-Hugh McDowell had certainly kept him dangling long enough.

He was dangling yet, really, so far as concerned the thirst of his eager Gallic heart for turbulent oceans of affection. At twenty-seven Sally Fitz was as stand-offish

with broom or mop as she had been at nineteen with fan or fish-rod, so that Mr. Goslin, nearing forty now and still mellowing, lugubriously perceived that there was a bit of the old Scotch in Sally Fitz. To the sunny Frenchman, ardent though forty, she was a dour bit, holding down emotional responsiveness in her deep bosom as if it were a paving-block. Why not a nosegay occasionally, and not forever the turnips of life? Matrimony for Mr. Goslin thus continued an adventure, so often baffling hope while rousing it anew. He was in love with his wife, and that's the truth. She kept on being desirable, and her growing ample only made her more so. Even if there were children ranging in size from her knees to her waist — but they made her most so. Those children, the symbol of — and yet that dish-towel!

Ah, the guile with which the poor Frenchman must needs angle for caresses, and then not get 'em! In the present instance, for example, he came in from the rural delivery-box with the Norfolk paper. There was serious news, he told her. She thought it something about the campaign for State-wide prohibition, or maybe his last shipment of potatoes had struck a glutted market. But no, it was about Serbia.

"Serbia?" she repeated in that tone when one does not quite catch an unfamiliar name.

"About the killing of the Austrian crown prince," he went on.

"Oh, that!" She did remember reading about it. The death of their sheriff, who had a lingering illness, would have been more of a sensation. "What you want to fool me for, Joe? At first I supposed one of the neighbors must have broken a leg or something. Serious news, hump!" Serbia, if that was the name, could be in the moon. No chain of circumstances was possibly long enough to link it with any personal interest for a James River trucker's wife.

"The de-fickle-ty," said Mr. Goslin gravely—there were a half-dozen words of the English that he never would get rolled out—"is here. First, there is Austria, which attacks Serbia. Second, there is Russia, which thereupon must fight Austria. Third, Germany fights Russia—"

"What," ejaculated Mrs. Goslin, "all that for a dead Dutchman?"

"No, not yet all, Sal-lee," he hastened on; "for, when Germany fights Russia, then instantly France—*la France, madame—*"

Sally Fitz nodded. "No, you Frenchmen wouldn't be able to keep out of it, and my dish-water is getting cold. Lift the kettle for me, Joe."

"The de-fickle-ty," persisted Mr. Goslin as he poured the water, "is that all Frenchmen will have to join the colors. Yes, *madame*, even I, one Joseph Guesclin. What else?"

She stared at one Joseph Guesclin. Behind the thick lenses of his glasses his eyes would have had a dull look, except that habitually the pupils of them were merry and the very eyes of his soul. But she looked now in vain for the dancing light of fun. Then her eyes snapped warily, with suspicion. Did the blessed creature expect her to throw herself in his arms and implore him not to march forth to war? He would betray her, would he, into a demonstration of overpowering affection?

But Mr. Goslin knew that Sally Fitz was not to be taken by close-formation tactics. More subtle was his maneuvering.

"When I shall be—be gone," he hastened on, his voice breaking the sheer real-

ism of his fictional prophesying, "would you, Sal-lee—please, Sal-lee—cover over the artichokes with straw in good time before the first freeze? I—I shall not be here, and if—if you—"

He was almost overcome. Besides, he wished to note how she was taking it. If Sally Fitz consented to bother herself with his beloved artichokes, which she called "those foreign thistles," then indeed must Sally Fitz consumingly adore him beyond all the dreams of his yearning. And Sally Fitz, betrayed, outgeneraled, cornered—Sally Fitz would shortly receive that tempestuous hug to which her loving heart was entitled. Deny, protest, and scold as she might, also would he kiss her, would that crafty Gaul.

Instead—instead she said she'd heard near about a plenty of his wild talk, and she wanted to get to her churning.

"Churning? *Zut!*" desperately exclaimed Mr. Goslin. "And of what import is churning when a brave man perishes for a kiss? But one, Sal-lee!"

The case for Sally Fitz is now complete. Every woman eight years married will agree that provocation justified the dish-towel.

"Oh," said Mr. Goslin, mopping his face with one tanned forearm; "oh, you big, beautiful doll!"

But she saw the wistful look behind the thick glasses, and she felt as she did when she had too harshly scolded one of the children. In the motherly way of full-bosomed mothers she hastened to humor him. She stopped to glance at the newspaper that was troubling him, exactly as she would stop her work to examine the oldest boy's stumped toe.

"There'll be seventeen million of them, will there?" she said, snatching at a line haphazard. "Seventeen million men out to kill each other!" It held her imagination for a second. "Pshaw, I reckon there's enough of them grown up to have more sense. And about those artichokes, Joe, which aren't even the Jerusalem kind that hogs 'll eat, you'll still be here to see to them yourself. Seventeen million men less one man will leave a plenty, and I hear the children down in the apple-tree. They'll stuff themselves till they tumble out."

"I go to see," said Mr. Goslin listlessly. "I am already too long away from the cucumbers."

Negro women and children were picking the cucumbers, and negro men were packing them into splint barrels with burlap tops, and the barrels were being hauled in drays down to the steamboat-landing. J. Guesclin was not a trucker who sent garden sass to town in a one-horse wagon. Sometimes, for a main crop, he chartered a Baltimore or Philadelphia schooner. On his way to the cucumbers he stopped at the apple-tree to let the children slide down him to the ground. For a moment each pair of dimpled arms clung about his neck, until he had done a grimace to make each tot laugh, and taken toll of a kiss.

"Papa, go like a great big old grampus chasin' a mobobile."

So he stopped a little longer to make the authentic noises of a grampus chasing an automobile. Mr. Goslin's vocal cords were attuned to his blithe soul, and in the cause of mirth there was no sound he could not mimic.

"Papa, go like—"

But he fled from the charge of the light brigade. After all, his business was trucking. Before he had helped load one wagon of cucumbers, for him also Serbia might have been vaguely somewhere on the moon. He was a busy man.

None the less he was at the mail-box ahead of the carrier next morning, waiting for his paper; and there he stood, reading it, reading every European despatch, long after the carrier had vanished on his way. Overnight the head-lines had swollen heavy and black. The heaviest and blackest ran across the top of the sheet. It was the flare for a news story that would still be a world story a thousand years hence. The editor knew that no type was big enough. He could only use the biggest he had, which had last done service to herald a verdict of murder in the first degree. Aptly he could have used that same line for this. However, he changed it to make it read:

ARMIES MOBILIZE!

Returning to the house, the Frenchman left the paper with Sally Fitz without a

word and went on out. He was working late potatoes that day, running one of the cultivators himself. Over a small item of news he would have been all animation. She looked round from her dusting of the piano-player and watched him go, puzzled by his far-away, brooding silence. She would much rather have him up to one of his ridiculous shindies. Then she saw the black letters, and she sat down and read the paper through.

"Goodness!" she gasped, incredulous. "They're worse than Mexicans!"

Which she wouldn't have minded; but it was making a difference in Joe. He was no longer the everyday Joe Goslin, husband, father, and provider. He was unfamiliarly Joseph Guesclin, a Frenchman. She knew; he was thinking of France. It was a time when a Frenchman would. Something more than his family and home, his cozy, prosperous happiness, and to-morrow's sunshine, something more than the country that gave him these, was laying a claim on him.

"As if he wasn't the identical same as an American!" she mused, jealously. "But I ought to have *made* him take out his papers long ago."

She had tried, but Sally Fitz wasn't so vehemently a reconstructed American herself. The daughter of old McDowell, who had shot at Yankee gunboats from that very river bank, wouldn't be. Still, this did not help her to see why a man wanted to keep on being a Frenchman just for some washed-out sentiment of nativity. It was so much more understandable and regular to be an American, like his family and neighbors. Sally Fitz had felt herself righteously provoked many times at his love of his native land, and now more than ever.

"Joe," she demanded when he came in to dinner and she saw that he was still thousands of miles away. "Joe, you're not studying about *going*?"

He went on sousing his face and hands under the spigot, and she put a hand on his shoulder and shook him a little. "Are you, Joe?"

He looked at her, blinking the water-drops off his lashes, and something in his

manner or the straining of his eyes for clear vision smote her.

"Joe?" she chided softly.

His mouth twitched under the black moustache, and his whole trouble came with his words. "That I *could* go!" he said.

"Of all things!" she ejaculated.

"I know," he admitted.

Whatever obstacles she had in mind, he was thinking of his eyes. They had caused his exemption from military service, so that while yet hardly more than a boy he had been free to leave France and track down opportunity across the ocean. He groped along the wall for the towel, and she put the end of into his hand.

"That would be the way," she declared. "Without your glasses the barn out there is only a blur of fog to you, and as for aiming a gun at a man, once you'd lost or broken them—"

"But I could not miss," he assured her, whimsical in spite of his mood. "There will be so many millions of them—of the Prussians—to shoot at."

There was one sedative, so Sally Fitz turned to the open window and called in the children.

"Yes, dinner," she told them. "There's Brunswick stew and corn on the cob—"

"O-oh!" went the children.

"And artichokes," said Sally Fitz craftily, whereupon Mr. Goslin put his hands on his knees and went "O-oh!"

"March, *all* you kids!" ordered Sally, leading with the soup-tureen.

That night, however, Sally Fitz did not sleep so well herself. The war about to be mixed in her dreams with her father's accounts of the war that had been. War was a vivid thing to Sally Fitz. Her father, describing an item of bloodshed, could, without leaving his front porch, point out the actual rock or scarred tree or bend in the river where it had happened. Lime-gray bullets and round shot were turned up in the furrow at every plowing.

"Joe," she said at breakfast, "I dreamed that Cossacks trampled down our melon-patch. The scalawags came clattering out of the woods down by the creek and commanded all my young turkeys."

"They could not be Cossacks," Mr. Gos-

lin corrected her. "The Cossacks are our allies."

Mrs. Goslin sniffed. It was apparent that that she would not trust them with her young turkeys.

"We were expecting a hostile Richmond fleet down the river any minute to bombard us," she went on; "and a North Ca'lina battle-ship squadron was trying to get past Old Point to meet *them*, and we were digging trenches with the potato-digger, and Surry County had sent us an ultimatum about something, and Isle of Wight County—"

"Well, what were the Isle of Blighters doing?" prompted Mr. Goslin.

"I don't exactly remember. Laying mines, I reckon, or maybe they were going to be neutral. Seemed like somebody ought to be neutral. Oh, dear!" she sighed. "But I'm certainly glad we're not Europe!"

"It would be right discouraging," assented Mr. Goslin, his eyes on the clock, his mind on the mail-carrier. His whimsicalities were only mechanical, and Sally gave it up.

He walked down the drive to the road and waited for the carrier again. Perhaps this morning's paper would say that everything was being smoothed over. Anxiously he hoped. His heart ached at thought of beautiful France attacked, and he unable to go. In the strength of his youth they had rejected him. They wanted none of his encumbering, useless sacrifice now. France did not waste the blood of her sons that way. No, he could not go; that was his sorrow. His sorrow if he could go and did go—but of that anguish he had not had occasion to think, since France did not waste the blood of her sons.

A square envelope in the mail riveted his attention before even the black headlines of the morning paper. It was from the French consulate in Norfolk. With thoughts so massed and jammed that no one thought wholly crossed the threshold of his brain, he tore open the envelope and read the official sheet of paper it contained. From the bottom he turned to the beginning and read again, as if the thing were a continuation of itself. Still no one

thought wholly entered, although there was a hammering throb along every pulse.

Leave all that was dearest to him in life!

The knowledge might clutch and gripe his heart; but no, it was no ordered fact of the brain, yet.

He was reading the missive for the third time when he stopped, looked around him dumbly, and hastened back to the house. He entered by the front door, mumbled something in French to Sally about an old leather trunk being his affair, and started up the stairs. But Sally barred his way with an arm on the newel. She had been watching for him, although angrily fighting down any such foolishness as a premonition.

"I go to pack," he explained vacantly, and again in French. Not in years had Sally heard French from his lips. She did not understand French.

"Joe, you're puffing like you'd been running! Now hand over that paper."

But instead of the newspaper he thrust on her the communication from the consulate.

"Wait, Joe! You know I can't read this gibberish. It's in French. What—?" She twisted his sleeve between her fingers to hold him.

He blinked, not realizing that words of such import could be blank and meaningless to another. Twice he began to tell her, and began again, because he was not using English. But at last she understood. Every valid French citizen in the world between the ages of twenty and forty-eight was commanded to join the colors. A French liner was leaving Baltimore the next day, and Joseph Guesclin was instructed to take that ship, after first reporting to the consul in Baltimore for his transportation.

"I go now to pack," said Joseph Guesclin.

"Joe!"

He turned. "Sal-lee!" But the very sob in his throat as he embraced her was but the grief of a man still dreaming. The only fact to which he was awake was the call to the colors.

She pushed him from her, shaking him in the robust, indulgent way she had. "Is the man daft?" she wanted to know. "Listen to me, Joe Goslin, you don't have

to go. Who is there to make you? And, what's more—what's everything—you have no right to go!"

"I have yet to pack," said Joseph Guesclin, going up the steps.

He took the north-bound that afternoon. He broke down, of course, telling them good-by at the station. On his knees he strained each little Goslin—flesh of his flesh, poignantly dear—one after another in his arms, and again, and all together, and held them while his heart burst; and the train was moving when he stumbled to his feet. Yet once more he hugged Sally, and ran, groping for the rail of the last platform. But not until he swung on the step and waved his hand and the little group back there went in the blur of his own tears, did Joe Goslin wake up. Then, all the way to Baltimore, late in the night, and aboard the liner next day, and at sea most of all, Joe Goslin kept on waking up.

After all, it was mostly a definition of patriotism that Mr. Goslin got straightened out; not in words, perhaps, but certainly in clarified mental vision. He and the French consul at Norfolk knew each other. Frenchmen were not so many around there but that the prominent ones would know one another. Mr. Goslin—no, M. Guesclin—always made himself acquainted with each new consul and paid his respects. It was a sort of wistful renewal of allegiance to the country of his birth. However, the call to the colors reached his address not because the consul happened to know him. It would have arrived in any event. That is, ever since he had left France a boy, and in all his wanderings after opportunity, a bureau of the ministry of war back in Paris knew always where he was; and at any time, whether he was tramping through the wheat country of Canada looking for work, or submerged among the work-hunters of Chicago, or keeping track of material at a Mexican mining-camp, a call to the colors would have reached his address. It made a Frenchman feel his importance, this having his country's eye always on him, so that she could appeal to him in her need. But after a little wakeful absence of sentiment the thing began to deaden into another phase, something grisly, uncanny,

That following eye ceased to be fond, benevolent. Nay, it never had been. It followed him, not to bestow, but to take. Nor was it any longer France that called, but a monster across the ocean, a famishing monster.

"Europe!" choked Mr. Goslin, shaking his fist in the east. "I say, damn Europe!" He did say it, exactly so, in plain English.

Well, and so the monster was ravenous past decency at last. Gaul, Teuton, and Slav, wherever they were, were summoned back to give their blood. *Zut, call it la mobilization générale*, if you like!

But it was when he peered over the stern rail at the haze of receding shore-line that Mr. Goslin awoke fully and for keeps. He gazed with longing, not knowing why. The longing grew to an ache, and still he did not know why. This was apart from his anguish at leaving his loved ones. Were he a reservist in France, he would be leaving his loved ones just the same. No, an affection never before suspected stole upon him for that land whose fading coast was marked by the haze. But why? Strange, it had only been a foreign country to him, even to the last, after more than half his life that it had nourished him. True, he had often felt a warmth of gratitude, but vaguely placed, as in any benign ordering of circumstances. There he had found opportunity. There the joy of hard work, day by day; joy, because of those he worked for. Yes, Sal-lee and the little ones, there they were, too. Mr. Goslin took off his glasses and rubbed the end of his handkerchief into a corner of each eye. With his glasses still in his hand, he batted his eyes, blinking at the tumbling waves and the white-and-green jumble of the ship's wake, and beyond. His gaze became fixed. Something was different. The haze in the west was like a hovering shroud of cannon-smoke, and the coast-line, the coast of America, was gone. Involuntarily his arms trembled from his side, outstretching.

"My country!" he spoke aloud, before he knew.

For a moment he was a bit nonplussed. France lay the other way, the way they were going; but his arms were held out to the vanished shore. Then he knew.

Nothing was clearer now to his logical French head—nothing. Back there he had left the things for which men fight—abandoned them and the country that gave them. He had no right to go; Sal-lee was right about that. And no more had he the heart to go. They were only faint tendrils that bound him to his native land; but the tap-root of his life, *that* was deep in the new soil, and to tear it out was to leave bleeding the shreds of his being. Generously he grieved for beautiful France in her peril, and half his worldly goods he would give, and later did contrive to give; but—himself he had no right to give. He owed himself to the country that had given him all. And what she had given him it was his duty to cherish and protect, whether by toil and loving watchfulness in the sunshine of peace, or with his life, should a storm-tossed night of war ever come.

Mr. Goslin in his awakened state ruefully shook his logical head.

"At the least," he meditated, "I have my pat-ri-tism on straight. Alas, but too late—too late!"

Five days thereafter—days, mind you!—Mr. Goslin came on Sally Fitz moodily feeding her young turkeys in the poultry-yard. He had left his trunk at the station, and his best clothes were gray with the Norfolk sand of the road. No neighbor happening to be at the station, the homing reservist had walked, buoyantly walked, the soul of him aglow behind the thick-glazed windows.

Sally Fitz turned at his step, and the pan of meal in the bend of her plump arm clattered to the ground.

"Oh, my goodness!" she gasped, sobbed, laughed. "What's the matter with the war of the dead Dutchman?"

He put his foot in the pan and hugged her.

After a while he was able to explain. The third day out they had received a wireless of the declaration of war and orders to race back out of the way of German cruisers. So the helm was shifted, and forced draft put on, and lights put out at night. "And the ship entire," said Mr. Goslin, "canvased over like a packing-house ham, and all of us skippers inside,

where," he added poetically, "there had been but one."

Sally looked up quickly. "Oh, Joe, you are back, really, aren't you?"

He ignored the mocking tribute. "Ah, *madame*, I am back more than you suspect," he declared. "First, listen to the officer of the French army who has charge of us, who says to me at the Baltimore dock as we step ashore: 'M. Guesclin,' says he, 'we do not know now when we can send reservists across the ocean—'"

"Good old ocean!" murmured Sally Fitz.

"Precisely. 'But when we can,' he says, 'we shall have room only for—for—' Oh, he was most desolated to have to say it, so I say it for him. 'For the most fit?' I say, and he nods his head. He thinks I am all desolation. 'Ah, *monsieur*,' he exclaims, 'you are a brave man. You respond. You would pay your debt to France, and she releases you. The debt is paid, *monsieur*.'

"Next, Sal-lee, listen to me. 'Ah, *mon capitaine*,' I say, 'I think so myself. Furthermore, captain,' I continue, 'in one-half hour, if you meet me then or subsequently, please to pronounce my name Goslin, so, for I go now for my papers which will turn me into a United States citizen.'"

"Joe!"

"Precisely *madame*, you just hear me say what I say."

"And you're not going to get called to any more old colors?"

"Not unless they have the name Old Glo-ree."

She sank her nose into his shoulder. "You are here, you are here! Oh," she said, "thank God for America!"

He pressed his lips to the back of her neck. "Because why, Sal-lee?" he questioned low in one ear. "Because I am here?"

She pushed herself away, alluringly flushed. "Go 'way from me, man! No, because I don't want Cossacks and things running off with my young turkeys."

It was not the wistful look that came into his eyes. He seized her deliberately. "You great big beautiful doll," he said, "I am onto your curves—" Meditatively he stroked her shoulder. "Of an archduchess they are so."

"Thinking," protested Sally, struggling, "thinking I got time to—"

"Oh, but," said Mr. Goslin wickedly, "I cut across through the kitchen garden, and those artichokes—I happened to notice that they have just been weeded, most devotedly hand-weeded. Ah, Sal-lee, it is no use; you are one crazy thing about me, and a few thousand kisses—joy of Heaven, here come the children!"

But after the children and the joy of the first days as they passed, and during the days that came, Joe Goslin, American, mourned as Joseph Guesclin, Frenchman. But all America, truly America, was mourning as Joseph Guesclin, Frenchman. There was in it the same generous heart, that throbbed and ached and filled with anguish; with wrath, too—a stifled and terrible wrath. Things dear to America were being assailed, and it was no aspersion on his loyalty to America, but truest symbol thereof, that Joe Goslin yearned ever more to be in trenches in a foreign land fighting for France. Vainly did Joe's Sally seek to rally him.

"Eh, but yes—yes," he would reply heavily. "I go now to the potatoes." And going, as lowly as a potato, he knew himself.

But at last—at last for those things dear to America, America, herself, would fight.

"The call, Sal-lee—it's the call to the colors!" cried Joe. In his hand was clenched the newspaper, the daily black lettering across the page now, the nation's heart-throb become articulate. "The colors, Sal-lee! This time the ve-rit-able colors—Old Glo-ree!" And Joe went.

"Back to your potatoes, sir!" sternly spoke the army officer to whom he went, and there was that in his manner which made Joe feel as if he were deserting under fire. "Jumping Junkers, man!" cried the officer, "we want to win this war, and it's potatoes that 'll do it!"

For the moment, Joe Goslin blinked. But then he understood. Involuntarily he saluted.

"I go now to the potatoes, *mon officier*," he said; and facing back to the trenches as ordered, as proud as prince or potentate, he knew himself.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor



THE riddle of greatness is still unsolved in spite of Shakespeare's contribution to the controversy. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them, the poet tells us. All of which describes a result rather than a cause. The dispute which wages about the dual factors of heredity and environment remains where it was. Undoubtedly both a man's inheritance and his environment each play an important part in the final result which we call character. Anyhow, the hero of the new six-part serial in the forthcoming number of this magazine—

“EASTWARD HO!”

BY WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINÉ

Author of “One Who Was Afraid,” “The Pirate of Panama,” “Men in the Raw,” etc.

is a man whose greatness is at once so genuine and so admirable we have no hesitation in saying Clay Lindsay will take rank among the most popular of ALL-STORY WEEKLY heroes who have appeared in our pages during the past year. Clay comes from Arizona without a rival in the daring game of breaking the broncos and estimating human beings. All his instincts are the healthy, normal instincts of a man who has lived under the open tent of the sky and with the ripple of a clean wind in his brain as well as in his hair. New Yorkers thought him a rube, and were ready to tolerate him as a picturesque “extra” in the big metropolitan movie. But from Clarendon Bromfield, rich clubman, down to Jerry Durand, ex-pugilist and present political gangster, all who measured wits or brawn with Lindsay learned they were face to face with greatness. Women, good and bad, felt the impact of his sterling goodness, and one woman— But here is your chance to get the story fresh from the author's pen without the despoiling revelations of the editor. Don't overlook this bet if you like a ripping good story with a Western hero and a metropolitan *mise en scène*. Here is an unusual combination, with the finest elements of both types of story. “EASTWARD HO!” opens in next week's number.

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DESPITE Rudyard Kipling's famous assertion that East and West will never meet till judgment day, every writer of Western stories from before the palmy days of O. Henry down to the present has endeavored to bring about this convulsion of nature. And probably nine-tenths of them have tried to make ends meet, so to speak, in the forms of New York and Western gunmen.

It's a fruitful situation, with all sorts of possibilities. Will the “effete East” vindicate herself in the guise of her champion, or will wild and woolly chivalry still reign supreme? Is there really a fundamental difference between the hard-shooting, hard-swinging, hard-living bad men of East and West, or are their differences merged, as Kipling further said, when both are strong men?

Each author has his own ideas on the subject; and the latest to tackle it is one whose stories met with instant favor from the very first. You shall have his version of “The Ballad of East and West” complete next week in

THE SACKING OF EL DORADO

BY MAX BRAND

Author of “Who Am I?” “A Rendezvous with Death,”
“No Partners,” etc.

Blinky Meyers was the type of gutter-bred gunman who gets into the public print all too often in New York. But in addition he was a gambler, and no mean one to get up against. To be sure, his notions of ethics were not exactly Hoyle's;

but, on the other hand, to play with him was a liberal education.

And Blinky went West—not in the sense of the trench phrase, either. Learn how in the next issue of this magazine.



You may never have camped on the sand-keys of Florida; carried a pack through the forests of the North; paddled a canoe on a Maine river, or watched a home-bound ship leave for home from the beach of a South Sea island. Perhaps your life has been spent in some one city, and your experiences go no further than the every-day experiences of the average man. Yet, when you read a story of a country in which you have never been, of people far different from your real-life associates, you will *feel* whether or not the writer knows his people and the setting of his tale. If he doesn't—wo to the author! The story is spoiled for the reader. In next week's issue you will find a novelette by an author who *does* know his country; one of the best tales of the Southern mountains that we have ever published—

THE SURRENDER OF MARTHA

BY EARL G. CURTIS

Author of "Brothers to Trouble," "Raffling Rowdy's Tools," "Sarah Worth's Feud," etc.

There's moonshine whisky in this story, but it isn't one of the usual run of moonshine stories. It's a really gripping drama of the people of the mountains by a man who knows them well; a well-told, zestful tale that will keep you breathlessly interested from start to finish.



The coasts of Bohemia are littered with the débris of war. From time immemorial men and women who have chafed under the yoke of convention have sought a wider freedom and a larger license within her hospitable boundaries. While the sane and conservative citizen, who looks askance at the vagaries of art, continues, as he always has, to view Bohemia with suspicion and occasionally drop a bomb or two within her walls. Both are extremists, and, therefore, seldom right. Charles Belmont Davis, in his story, "BOHEMIA, GOOD-BY," is a special pleader for neither side, but he lets us see how even success, respectability, and comfort must sometimes turn with regret to the former haunts of Bohemia to recapture an experience the memory of which lingers like the poignant regret of a day that is done. Preston turned, and then— But why betray the author's secret? You will find it all beautifully told in next week's magazine.



In next week's issue you will find one of the most beautifully written stories that has appeared in any magazine for a long time—"THE SILENT POOL," by George Gilbert. But do not get the idea that it is all writing and no story; the tale that Mr. Gilbert has to tell is worthy of

his way of telling it. The scene is laid in India; the characters are natives of that land of romantic mystery; the action moves with something of the tragic certainty that made Kipling's Indian tales the talk of the reading world. This Gilbert story is something that no lover of the best in short fiction can afford to miss reading.



HAVE you ever noticed how free from suspicion and rash judgment, unconsciously, good people are, and how quick to rush to moral conclusions are the people who make a profession of goodness or want to devote their lives to the moral uplift of their neighbors? Nothing can down the people who get a moral satisfaction out of their own conscious rectitude except a rude awakening. Gilbert Riddell, in "A LIBERAL EDUCATION," instances the case of a woman who had drawn her conclusions and was planning her frontal attack for the reformation of two friends when— But we cannot risk taking the edge off of your appreciation of this clever characterization by betraying the writer's secret. Read this story in next week's magazine, and you will be more ready to give the other fellow (and his girl) the benefit of the doubt.



NEXT week you will find another corking animal story by Harold de Polo. This time the four-footed hero is a wolf, caught when a cub by a brutal man and broken to pull a sled like a dog. Then came the call of the wilderness, and then— But you must read this great story yourself. It's title is "BAD BOILEAU AND BEAUT," and it's very well worth reading.



REAL APPRECIATION

TO THE EDITOR:

Have been reading and thoroughly enjoying the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for a year or two, and look forward with pleasurable anticipation to receive every number.

A conversation between chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, Melville C. Fuller, and his associate, Judge Lamar, is related, in which the chief justice declared that he found relaxation from his judicial work in reading ten-cent novels, to which Judge Lamar answered that he enjoyed the five-cent stories better because there was more action in them.

The readers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY can find a variety of good fiction to suit not only the taste of the lover of action, but that of the most fastidious reader of the best literature.

Furthermore, there is not a story which is not clean and fit to be read by the youngest member of a family.

The love stories are not filled with the vague, half-baked sex dreams and problems of the idle rich; but they present the fine heart-throbs of clean, vigorous, healthy men and women, boys and girls, of every clime and country.

The world is its field—one week we are in the dreamy Oriental Far East; the next in the breezy, dashing, fighting West; again adventuring in the Caribbean, and, as during the past few weeks, dwelling among the ancient Greeks. In fact, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY furnishes good reading for the boy or girl, the clergyman, the business man, the ordinary man or woman who desires to pass a pleasant hour. The college professor, the busy lawyer, the profound philosopher, and the hard-working judge can find some story to appeal to his tastes or furnish him with that relaxation all workers, mental or physical, require.

300 Broadway,
New York City.

F. W. POLLOCK.

"CLAVERING THE INCREDIBLE" THE BEST OF ALL

TO THE EDITOR:

May I add a word of appreciation for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY along with your other readers? Though not a subscriber, I have been a constant reader of the magazine since back in the *Cavalier* days. The best story to me then was "Clavering the Incredible," and I have not yet found one that surpasses it.

With such writers as Zane Grey, C. B. Stilson, Robert Simpson, Max Brand, Harold Titus, Jackson Gregory, Johnston McCulley, Hulbert Footner, and J. B. Hendryx it is easy to see how the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is among the best—thanks to the editor. I see many requests for sequels to "The Untamed" and "The Texan." If there are sequels, let us hope they are good ones, for those are two stories that can easily be spoiled by a sequel; and do not change the character of *Whistling Dan* if he is brought back, for 'twould be better to leave him alone. "The Grouch" and "Broadway Bab" were different from the usual run of the stories; they give us a change with their humor. Give us more of them.

"The Border Legion" was another good story, but, like *Clavering the Incredible*, I see no excuse for a man standing up before a gang of murderers and being shot to pieces to protect a woman who does not even appreciate the act, to say nothing of the man. Such men are scarce: women also.

I am glad to see that *Peter Gross* is with us again. He is one of my favorite characters. I also like *Semi-Dual*; and what has become of that man *Crewe*? Stella M. Düring's story, "Temptation of Carlton Earle," keeps one always interested, and lacks those tiresome, long descriptions. Pardon the long letter, but accept my best wishes for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

NELLIE PUTNAM.

Pineville, Kentucky.

NOTE: "Clavering the Incredible" has just been published in book form under the title "The Bite of Benin." See announcement in the September 13, 1910, issue.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

May I express my sincere admiration of your splendid magazine? Most all of the stories are fine, but I particularly enjoy the "different" kind. I've noticed some knocking the Paloisian stories, calling them impossible. I do not consider them so, for I know that one can travel in the "astral," for I have done it many times myself. Are we going to have more *Semi-Dual* stories? I wish it were possible to find out what became of *Larry* and *Lakla*.

MRS. S. M. HEALY.

Missoula, Montana.

As I have never seen a letter from this part of the State in the Heart to Heart Talks will write you, as I read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I am not a subscriber. I get the book from the newsstand, and just think it is fine. I like all of the stories. Of course there are some I like better than others. We must have a sequel to "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." It was just fine; and also "The Untamed." Tell Max Brand to hurry and bring us a sequel, as *Kate* is unhappy without *Dan*. As ever a reader,

MRS. LUCY J. STOWE.

Thorndale, Texas.

I just want to write and tell you how much I appreciate your magazine, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. The "different" stories are the best, and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" is the finest piece of fiction yet written. My favorite authors are: A. Merritt, E. R. Burroughs, and Max Brand. Please, Mr. Editor, can you tell me if there is going to be a sequel to "The Conquest of the Moon Pool"? I don't like people who knock our stories, and especially "different" ones. Can't you wake Burroughs up to write us a story soon; and A. Merritt? I see that every one is pulling for Max Brand, and I am pulling, too, for that matter. Wishing your magazine good luck.

PELHAM ANDERSON.

Montgomery, Alabama.

Will you kindly send me the issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for July 19, as, for some unknown reason, our druggist failed to receive his stock for that week. If his supply of some other periodical had been side-tracked it would not have mattered very much; but when it's the ALL-STORY WEEKLY that's missing, believe me, it's a tragic occurrence. Just a line to compliment you on "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." It's the best I've read along those lines since Rider Haggard's novel, "King Solomon's Mines." There is no need to ask for a sequel, as I cannot conceive an author with such a brilliant imagination as A. Merritt possesses leaving the children of his brain sealed up forever in the mystic land of Narnia.

GEO. L. THORPE.

Toledo, Ohio.

ALL-STORY WEEKLY READERS' EXCHANGE

N. B.—THE OBJECT OF THIS DEPARTMENT IS TO GIVE READERS WHO WISH TO SECURE COPIES OF THE MAGAZINE WHICH WE CANNOT SUPPLY A CHANCE TO MAKE THEIR WANTS KNOWN. SPACE IS TOO LIMITED TO ALLOW OF OUR PUBLISHING THE LETTERS OF THOSE WHO ONLY HAVE MAGAZINES TO DISPOSE OF. THE LATTER SHOULD WATCH THIS COLUMN, AND COMMUNICATE DIRECT WITH THOSE WHO ASK FOR CERTAIN NUMBERS. LETTERS TO BE PRINTED SHOULD CONTAIN COMPLETE ADDRESS.

Will you please oblige me by putting a notice in your Readers' Exchange to the effect that I will pay twenty-five cents for a copy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for July 13, 1918, if any one who has this copy and is willing to sell it will first write me.
H. L. COOPER.

27 Platt Street,
Albion, New York.

I am willing to pay anything within reason for a copy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for January 11, 1919. Reader having same, please write to
(MISS) M. ELIZABETH PENNINGTON.

Belmont,
San Mateo County, California.

I will pay twenty cents each for *The Argosy* and ALL-STORY WEEKLY of January 18, 1919, to any reader who has them.

Yours respectfully,
2338 South Sixth Street, HARRY BLUM.
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

I would like to obtain the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for December 14, 1918. Am willing to pay one dollar for a copy. Any one having that number, please write, before forwarding, to

Clinton, Minnesota. ENOCH LUNDHOLM.

I will pay twenty cents or twenty-five cents a copy for the *All-Story* commencing December, 1913, containing all the instalments of the "Warlord of Mars," by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Please write before forwarding.

Phoebe, Virginia. LEGRAND LENNIS.

I wish to obtain a copy of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for July 13, 1918. Will any one having copy of this issue in good condition—cover not too essential—please write me, giving price of same?
MRS. W. C. WHITE.

Live Oak, Florida.

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MRS. F. L. RODGERS.

Elsberry, Missouri.

I would like to get the following ALL-STORY WEEKLIES: August 31, 1918; September 28, 1918. Would like to hear from any one who has the books.

Box 8, JOHN R. McCULLOCH.
Monitor, Alberta, Canada.

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Harriston, Oregon.

NEIL BOYNTON.

I will give twenty-five cents a copy for the following numbers: *All-Story*, January, 1914; *All-Story Cavalier*, November 14, 1914; November 21, 1914. Please write before sending.
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New York, N. Y.

I want to get the January 11, 1919, issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. WALTER A. SCHELL.
1307-1309 Market Street,
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

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PEARL A. KNECE.
Laurellville, Ohio.

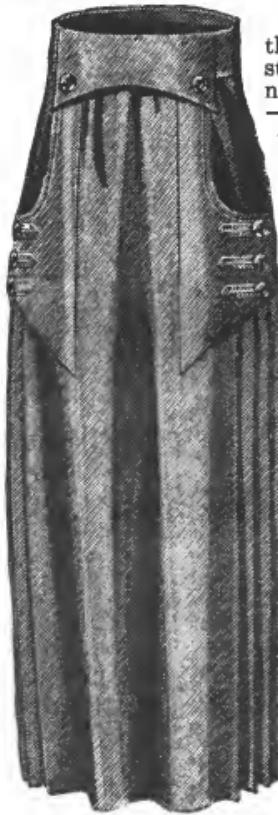
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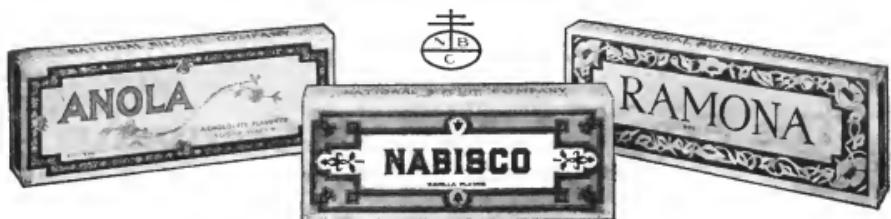
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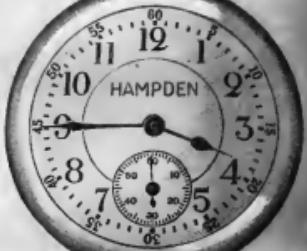
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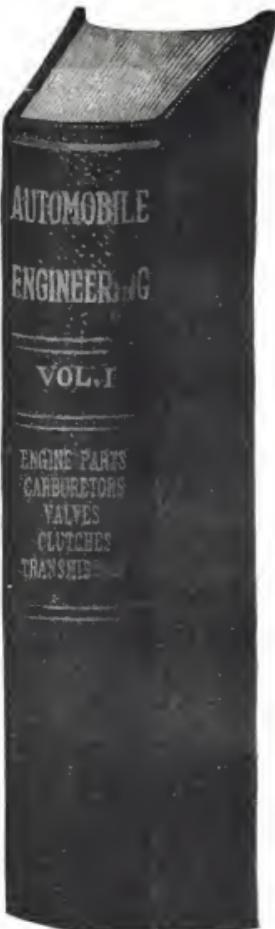
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